Fresh grad pledges $4,000 a year to help needy students

By Maria Almenaar

WHILE most fresh graduates plan to spend their first pay packet on clothes, holidays or a car, Mr Darren Lim, 24, is giving his away to a needy stranger.

And it is not just his first pay cheque. The Singapore Management University (SMU) graduate is starting a scholarship named after his parents — Ee Seng and Claire — that will pay part of the tuition for one accountancy student every year indefinitely.

Said the accountancy graduate with a major in law: "I've always wanted to give my parents something special and I also wanted to thank my university. So this was the ideal way to do both."

Mr Lim, SMU's valedictorian this year, has pledged $4,000 a year for the scholarship, which will go to a deserving accountancy student who has at least completed the first year. The money will cover more than half the $7,500 in annual tuition fees.

It will come from his own pocket, not his well-to-do family. His father is a property developer and his mother, a retired lecturer.

Mr Lim, who is now an investment banker with HSBC, sees his gesture as a modest one.

"For a start, it will mean setting aside about two months' pay every year, "but in comparison with a lot of other generous individuals, I don't see this as anything special," he said.

The president of SMU, Professor Howard Hunter, disagrees. He said: "Darren is the first graduate in Singapore — fresh out of university — to pledge annual donations to fund a scholarship for needy students."

"We are very encouraged by his philanthropic giving, especially when he has only just started to receive his first few months of pay cheques."

Mr Lim believes his bequest is the least he can do for SMU, which he said built up his self-confidence and kept him motivated.

He said: "The lecturers take you seriously and they take the time to even have coffee with you and listen to what you have to say."

Being valued for his ideas made a difference to his grades.

From scoring "average" grades of A, B and C in his A-levels, he became a student with a Grade Point Average of 4.0 at SMU, which means he scored almost all As in his years there.

Life at SMU was not just about books. He founded the SMU Accounting Society, did volunteer work in Myanmar and attained a brown belt in aikido, a Japanese form of self-defence.

His father, Mr Lim Ee Seng, 54, the chief executive officer of Centrepoint Properties, also noted what SMU did for his son: "I've really seen the change in Darren in the last few years. He used to be satisfied with life and didn't have much self-confidence, but now he has the drive to take on many different tasks."

Over 620 SMU students, the university's third batch, will graduate today at a ceremony in Suntec Singapore.

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