Act of kindness to honour his parents

Darren Lim, 24, budding philanthropist

AT THE Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, the walls bear inscriptions of students who chose to leave their mark by offering sponsorships or scholarships to future needy students.

It was something that strongly impressed then-Singapore Management University student Darren Lim, an accountancy graduate with a major in law, who was there on an exchange programme last year.

He brought the idea back to his School of Business Dean, Professor Pang Eng Fong, and asked if he could have a scholarship named after his parents, funded from his first paycheck as an investment banker.

The 24-year-old behind the Ee Seng and Claire Lim Accountancy Scholarship, who was also named valedictorian this year, explained: “I wanted to thank my parents for what they had done for me and to thank the school because it gave me exactly what I needed and exceeded all my expectations.”

His plan to unveil the scholarship as a surprise for his parents during his valedictorian speech was thwarted by The Straits Times, which reported it on July 7.

It was followed by a wave of publicity that he cringed at, especially when Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong brought his act of philanthropy up again in his National Day Rally speech in August as a way to build strong bonds among Singaporeans.

“I never regretted doing it, but the scholarship was actually created to honour my parents and the school, so I would have preferred if the attention had been showered on them and not me,” said the oldest son of property developer Lim Ee Seng and retired polytechnic lecturer Claire Lim, both in their 50s.

He grew up in a semi-detached house in Kembangan and has a younger brother, Samuel, 23, who reads law at the National University of Singapore.

He is clearly more comfortable making quiet contributions. He was the first elected president of the SMU Accounting Society, which looked after student welfare, from 2004 to 2005.

The alumnus of Montfort Junior School, Zhong Hua Secondary School and Victoria Junior College plans to keep on giving $4,000 a year as long as he can manage it, and more if he comes into more money.

It looks like his act of kindness will be paid forward. His scholarship’s beneficiary, Ms Chen Hui-fang, 21, has already indicated her intention to carry on the tradition.

He said: “I was really hoping something like that would happen in the long run, but it caught me by surprise that it happened that quickly. It is definitely encouraging.”