Scholarships from one who’s been there

TOR CHING LI
chingli@newstoday.com.sg

AS A bright student from St Joseph’s Institution, Mr Wong Kwok Leong had the grades to make it to university but not the money. He had to cut short his education as his family could not afford to pay the fees.

But for the next 30 years, the plucky lad used his wits to overcome his lack of schooling, building up his empire by supplying goods to ships in Singapore.

Now 91, Mr Wong—a retiree for over 40 years—wants to help deserving students meet their full potential, free from financial worries.

So, together with his 68-year-old wife for the past 50 years, the Wongs donated $1 million to the Singapore Management University (SMU) on their golden wedding anniversary yesterday to start the Wong Kwok Leong Endowed Scholarship.

“There are many bright students in Singapore who unfortunately fall behind their peers because of financial hardship. We believe in extending an equal chance of a proper education to these deserving students,” said the self-made businessman, who was also involved in tin-mining business in Malaysia and the hotel sector in Hong Kong.

Starting from the academic year beginning in August next year, at least three one-year scholarships, worth $10,000 each, will be awarded to eligible SMU students annually under the new scholarship.

This is the first time the Wongs are setting up a scholarship for undergraduates, in a rare act of goodwill from one ordinary Singaporean to another.

Last week, TODAY reported that while the number of millionaires in Singapore has been increasing every year to reach a new high of 55,000 high net-worth individuals last year, such acts of generosity are still a rare occurrence as Chinese businessmen prefer to endow their wealth to their offspring.

The Wongs, who have three grown-up children, donate regularly to various hospitals and temples here and overseas. Said Mrs Wong: “Credit goes to the SMU for taking the wise approach of making community service a compulsory requirement for all its undergraduates. We are very encouraged by this commendable educational policy of instilling the right character and values at a young age.”

In addition to strong academic results and active involvement in co-curricular activities, applicants’ per capita monthly household income must not exceed $900. Reflecting the Wongs’ belief in community service, scholars are expected to develop a fund-raising proposal in the field of volunteerism and charity work.