

B10 Volunteers win Wee Chong Jin scholarship



2 student volunteers clinch new law scholarship

By **MATTHIAS CHEW**

LAW undergraduate Seng Han Ting wants to see a more just society – and one way is to help those who may be wrongly convicted by the criminal justice system.

The 24-year-old is part of the National University of Singapore (NUS) Criminal Justice Club's Innocence Project, which aims to discover and examine possible cases of wrongful convictions.

The project also seeks to provide redress for people who have exhausted all avenues for appeal.

Mr Seng's active involvement in pro bono projects – which include volunteering at legal clinics – helped him clinch the inaugural Wee Chong Jin Scholarship in Law.

He was one of the first two recipients of the scholarship set up with money donated by the family of the late Mr Wee, Singapore's first chief justice after independence.

The other recipient was Mr Eugene Neo Zhi Wei, 22, from Singapore Management University (SMU). SMU and NUS each received \$250,000.

NUS will award two scholarships a year, and SMU one. Each cash award is worth \$10,000. SMU will also use some of its money to start a \$6,000 prize for the top graduate of its post-graduate juris doctor programme.



Mr Seng (left) of NUS and Mr Neo of SMU were selected for the scholarship on the basis of their academic results and participation in community work. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

Both undergraduates received their certificates from Mr Wee's wife Cecilia Wee, 81, at a ceremony at the Supreme Court yesterday.

Speaking at the event, Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong said the scholarship

“is a fitting memorial to Chong Jin's contribution to the administration of justice in Singapore, as the longest-serving chief justice from 1963 to 1990”.

Mr Wee, who died in 2005 at the

age of 87, served at the Bar and was appointed a High Court judge in 1957 before being appointed the Republic's first chief justice at the age of 46.

He was also the longest-serving chief justice in the Commonwealth nations.

Explaining the awards, both universities said recipients are selected not just on the basis of academic performance. They are also required to be active in community or charity work.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Seng cited the 2008 case of Yunani Abdul Hamid, who had pleaded guilty to drug trafficking but was later acquitted.

The case showed that wrongful convictions can happen in Singapore, he said.

The presence of such cases convinced him that the project could “do something significant”.

The other recipient, Mr Neo, is also an active volunteer.

The second-year SMU student took part in a Law Society project to advise elderly citizens on their legal rights, and participated in a community service project in Taiwan, where he taught English to underprivileged children.

Mr Neo said yesterday that the award would remind him to uphold the values that Mr Wee held dear, which to him were “compassion for man, fairness and a love for the law”.

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