

Life Storeys

LIFE IN THE HDB HEARTLANDS

Turn into Captain Planet and *Live Green* *Live Happy* with Flat Facts

How your public housing blocks are more alike to a social networking website than you'd expect



Live Well with BFFs

How to seal a "decades-long" friendship



Live Together with good neighbours in the 'hoods

Tan Yu Yun, the 11 year-old winner of the new Student category for last year's Good Neighbour Award is one of the 17 who bagged awards for showing their care for the community, as well as for their artistic skills.



Ms Grace Fu, (former) Senior Minister of State for National Development and Education, presented the award to Tan Yu Yun

LOVE Thy Neighbours

For many teenagers, going to the library may seem like a total snoozefest, but for the past year, Tan Yu Yun had been spending an hour every weekend at the Bukit Panjang Community Library.

During those hours, she would coach a young boy whom she knows as Xiaomin, 8, in English language. Xiaomin and his mother had just landed in Singapore from China when he met Yu Yun and her mother at a neighbourhood tuition centre in 2009. As their mothers became fast friends, Yu Yun was roped in to help Xiaomin with his English homework.

"When we see neighbours in need, we should lend a helping hand," shares the Primary 5 student of Zhenghua Primary School, "We never know when we may need their help in return."

To honour individuals living in HDB estates who have made an impact on their neighbourhood, the Good Neighbour Award (GNA), launched on 26 April 2009, was presented for the second time by organisers Housing & Development Board (HDB) and People's Association (PA).

It was supported by Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM) and Singapore Press Holdings (SPH).

Yu Yun, who lives in Bangkit Road, is the recipient of the inaugural "Student" category of the Good Neighbour Award. She

received a \$200 voucher and a plaque.

Her nominator and schoolmate at Zhenghua Primary School, Ng Xin Lin, 11, says her friend has an impressive and really long list of community "good deeds" to her name.

"Every time we chat, Yu Yun will tell me about yet another interesting activity in her neighbourhood! I remember her telling me how she invents fun and educational games on a whim for the younger kids living around her."

"She would draw a shape on a piece of paper, show it to them before covering it up and ask them to guess which shape it was. It makes me want to play too! She is very kind, helpful and friendly. Her mother is very supportive of her efforts too."

Another first for the award is the HeartlanD Beat Art Competition which shares the theme of GNA 2010, "My Neighbour, My Friend, It Begins with Me." The competition aims to create greater awareness of good social behaviour in primary school students through art. The competition was so popular that it garnered 4,476 works of art!

Hoe Rye-is, a Primary 3 student at CHIJ Katong Primary School, took home the first prize for category A (lower primary).

"My painting shows how I celebrated the Mid-Autumn Festival this year with my



Hoe Rye-is (in red, back row) enjoys her time with her neighbours, some of whom have known her since their kindergarten days

classmate and neighbour, Nufayl. He's wearing a *baju kurung* because his family had just returned from Hari Raya visits. My other neighbours, William and Tara, celebrated with us, too. We may be of different races but we celebrate all festivals and have fun together!" says Rye-is excitedly.

Neo Hui-Lyn, a Primary 4 student at St Anthony's Canossian Primary School, won top honours for category B (upper primary). "I painted a picture of my neighbours because I see them every day after school. In my painting, I'm saying hello to them happily. One of them is my good friend, Maslinah, 10, with her younger sister, Siti, 5. To me, good neighbours are people who help one another and keep our neighbourhood clean," says Hui-Lyn.

Kurumbian Vengadasalam, 56,



Neo Hui-Lyn is a budding artist who gets her inspiration from her neighbourhood



Kurumbian Vengadasalam (left) with Meyyappan Thirunavukkarasu who nominated him

is a national recipient of the GNA 2010 (open category). Blessed with a green thumb and a heart of gold, he is the man behind the community garden at Serangoon North Avenue 3, where a collection of different plants basks in the sunshine.

Many children often stop to admire and learn about the various plants, which include banana, papaya, tapioca and jasmine. This remarkable landscape is the perfect educational zone for both young and old.

Besides the community garden, Kurumbian can always be found assisting with the floor and block parties at the block he resides in. He has been living in Serangoon North for 15 years now.

"I'm very happy to have won this award. I'll continue to do more for our neighbours

and friends to provide a better environment for our future and for the children here," says Kurumbian, who received a \$500 voucher and a plaque for his community spirit.

Know a good neighbour? Nominate him/her for the Good Neighbour Award 2011. Nomination forms are available at HDB Branch Offices, Community Clubs and Residents' Committee Centres or visit www.hdb.gov.sg/heartlandbeat

Don't know where to have fun in your neighbourhood? HeartlanD Beat (www.hdb.gov.sg/heartlandbeat) will point you in the right direction! The one-stop portal showcases all the fun and meaningful community events and parties happening right in your neighbourhood. Find information that you need in a matter of clicks. Fun e-games are available for your enjoyment too.

WHAT MAKES GOOD NEIGHBOURLY BEHAVIOUR? WE ASK AROUND THE 'HOODS

1 "Small acts such as reminding neighbours to remove their laundry when it rains or watering their plants when they are away, and maybe even sharing dishes when we cook!" – **Muhammad Firdaus, 20, Toa Payoh (Lorong 5)**

2 "My neighbour is a good example. When it rains, she walks over to my flat to alert my maid. She also never fails to pass us some of her yummy cookies and cakes whenever she bakes!" – **Fann Sim, 20, Woodlands Ave 6**

3 "My neighbours come over to chit chat over food sometimes. It's all about listening to one another like old friends do." – **Grace Lee, 49, Sengkang Rivervale St**

4 "Someone who bothers to buy a souvenir back from her vacation overseas – my neighbour once got me a shirt from China. It was very thoughtful and caring of her." – **Khoo Siang Ho, 71, Jalan Bukit Merah**

5 "Chatty, friendly and sociable people make good neighbours. It's all about the company." – **Anthony S/O Jonathan Dorai, 20, Ang Mo Kio Ave 6**

That's The Spirit!



Madam Sarina (centre) at the Fernvale Court Welcome Party last year

There is nothing like a party, especially one that allows you to get to know your neighbours in a casual, friendly atmosphere.

After all, these are the people you are going to be living next to for a good many years to come, and there is nothing like having someone you can turn to should the need arise, big or small.

Welcome Parties — organised by the HDB since 2006 — are a godsend for those who like to make new friends but are too shy to make the first move.

Let's face it, that means most of us!

Besides new flat owners, Welcome Parties are also attended by Advisers, grassroots leaders and HDB staff, so there is no better opportunity than this to meet the people you will definitely be interacting with in the future.

The new home owners of Fernvale Court met at one such party last year. As they enjoyed the Taekwondo performances and carnival games, two neighbours found out they knew more about each other than they realised.

**MADAM SARINA NORDIN, 28
PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO A
GENERAL PRACTITIONER**

“Not knowing anyone in the estate when my husband and I moved in around July last year, we thought attending the Welcome Party would be a good chance to meet other new residents.

I participated in a Know-Your-Neighbour contest during

the party with Shufang, another new resident I got to know during trips to the nearby NTUC supermarket. We had a lot of fun and won NTUC vouchers each — the first prize!

We're both mothers of four-year-old girls and bonded through our experiences. We also meet whenever we bring our kids to the playground during the weekend. I was surprised at how much Shufang remembered of me from our previous conversations, even details like my unit number, and where I used to stay.

It's an event I'd encourage all new residents to participate in. When you make friends with your neighbours, the entire estate becomes a community you can depend on.

For example, there's an elderly couple who lives across from our unit. They went out together one day but got separated. The husband came back first, but didn't have the house keys, so he sat outside the lift landing to wait for his wife.

I saw him sitting there when I walked out to throw away my trash and because his legs are weak from old age, I invited him into our flat to rest. His wife came home with the keys after an hour and a half. This is why it's important to know your neighbours — just so that you can lend them a helping hand whenever you can.

It's this mentality that I picked up from my mother when I was staying in Chai Chee. The neighbourhood was one big family where everyone knew one another. If you needed someone

Ain't no party like a block party! Sarina Nordin tells us there's no better way to know your neighbours than through a party.



Madam Sarina opens her door — and heart — to her neighbours

to look after your kids while you attended to something urgent, you wouldn't have to think twice about asking someone next door for help. My mum looked after my neighbours' kids all the time — sometimes they'd even sleep over.

Sure, the *kampung* spirit is definitely not the same today because of a faster pace of life. But if you're faced with an emergency, the people that you can rely on for immediate help won't be your parents or the authorities; it will be your neighbours!”

FUN FACTS

Did you know that...

- 1** Fifteen Welcome Parties have been held since Sep 2009
- 2** The most recent ones at Strathmore Avenue and Kang Ching achieved the highest participation rates so far
- 3** Tanjong Pagar Town Council's 5-year Masterplan was revealed at the Strathmore Avenue event
- 4** At Kang Ching Welcome Party, more than 50 percent found that the activities during the party provided opportunities for them to interact with their neighbours



Hyder, Iman, Suhana and Fadhil bonding over a board game on a weekend 'double date'

From bonding over boredom to double dating, neighbours Suhana and Iman let *Life Storeys* in on how their friendship blossomed.

BFFS- Bonding Through Food Finds

Good food brings people together and this is especially true for neighbours Suhana Ab, 29, and Iman Harharah, 27.

Almost two years ago on a Saturday night, a neighbourly friendship was ignited when the queue at the popular Haji Radi Indonesian Satay stall at the famous Old Airport Road Food Centre and Shopping Mall was exceptionally long.

Suhana and Iman, who were bored with the wait, started chatting about how the tantalising-smelling satay would be smoked to perfection and well worth the wait. The young women hit it off straight away.

These days, Suhana and her husband, Fadhil Abdat, 29, often hang out with Iman and her husband Hyder Aljunied, 28, at each other's place. The two women often bump into each other at the satay stall as well as during evening strolls in the neighbourhood with their husbands.

As it turned out, the men also hit it off well. The couples regularly chill out at each other's flat as they live just a block apart. They like playing games on the Wii or card games like Monopoly Deal at Suhana's place and

PlayStation games at Iman's.

During her first visit, Suhana brought her home-baked cookies and soya beancurd from Ho Hup, a popular stall in the food centre near their place. Now, the practice has become routine, with Iman bringing her home-cooked food to Suhana's as well. Recently, Suhana found a good shepherd's pie recipe and promptly baked a batch up for their usual 'double date'. In turn, Iman welcomed her guests with a simple but delicious dish of aglio olio pasta.

Apart from food, Suhana also tips Iman off about the products and services with the best value in the vicinity. One tip she gave to Iman was the tailor on the second level of the food centre.

"They are good and their alterations come cheap! I like to share little things like that with Iman. We've become such close friends. We've started going out to the movies and even to parties together as we can double-date," says Suhana; a testament that their friendship has evolved beyond the realm of sharing food.



Iman and Suhana share home-cooked food and shopping tips

HERE'S HOW YOU SEAL A "DECADES-LONG" FRIENDSHIP - OVER BAK KWA AND CHICKEN RICE



Wen Shiun, who used to be taken care of by Lim Lay Bee (centre), on a Chinese New Year visit with his mother, Helen Teo (right)

Do you treat your neighbours the same way you treat your family? Helen Teo definitely does. Helen, 45, and Lim Lay Bee, 72, have known each other for over two decades as they live in the same block of flats.

The latter used to babysit the former's two sons, who are now 16 and 21. Lay Bee, a widow who has suffered from stroke twice, is now living alone with a domestic helper as her four children are living on their own.

So Helen's husband, Chor Jin, frequently buys extra food— especially Lay Bee's favourite chicken rice from Kim San Leng coffeeshop at Bishan— and delivers it to Lay Bee's flat. They have become as close as a family.

Lay Bee will always return the favour come Chinese New Year. She swears by the Chinese New Year cookies sold at a stall in the wet market of Toa Payoh Lorong 8. Even though she has moved to Bishan for 22 years now, the 72 year-old still hops into a taxi and heads for Toa Payoh to pick up the goodies every year.

For years now, Lay Bee always checks on Helen's preferences before she orders her annual lot of CNY cookies, just so she can help Helen place her order before stocks run out.

"My daughter always orders *bak kwa* from Kim Hwa Guan at Toa Payoh. So every year, I order a box just for Helen so her boys can have them, too," says Lay Bee.

THEY LIKE

- Ming Kee Chicken Rice Porridge, #01-522, Kim San Leng Food Centre, Block 511, Bishan, Street 13
- Kim Hwa Guan #02-40, Toa Payoh West Market and Food Court, Block 127, Lorong 1
- Ho Hup Soya Bean, #01-162, Old Airport Road Food Centre and Shopping Mall
- Haji Radi Indonesian Satay, #01-46, Old Airport Road Food Centre and Shopping Mall, Block 51, Old Airport Road

During birthdays, the two closely-knit families come together to celebrate the occasion. The simple act of sharing and giving food definitely does wonders in bringing families together!

As the members of Admiralty's Garden of Happiness will happily tell you, the best harvest you can get is friendship.



A Blooming Good Time

From Left: Shirley, Kok Liang, Madam Teng, Madam Chen

Like clockwork at six every morning, 61 year-old Madam Chen Yen Inn turns up at the modest garden square in front of Block 684C at Woodlands Drive 62.

She gets to "work", picking up fallen leaves, picking off bugs and generally fussing over the plants. As dawn breaks, a

steady stream of neighbourhood residents join her, chatting merrily as they bustle about.

Aptly named the "Garden of Happiness", the garden — which spans about half the size of a basketball court — is an idea conceived by Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, then Adviser to Sembawang GRC. He mooted it

in early 2010.

He suggested starting an interest group for gardening enthusiasts, while creating bonding opportunities for the different ethnic groups within the Admiralty Zone 5 area. On 14 November 2010, the Garden of Happiness was officially opened under the Housing &

Development Board's Community in Bloom – *in the Heartlands* programme, with strong support from the Admiralty Zone 5 RC, National Environment Agency, National Parks Board and Sembawang Town Council.

And in the span of nearly a year since planting began in May 2010, friendships have definitely bloomed.

Shirley Goh, Mdm Chen's 43 year-old daughter, who has been designated "head" of the garden, says, "Many neighbours now drop by our house looking for my mother. Many who were once strangers are now friends simply because of our shared love for gardening!"

Working Hand In Hand

Planting and landscaping tips were offered by National Parks Board, and the first set of concrete tiles for the entrance pathway was given by the Sembawang Town Council. Shirley – a beauty therapist by day – then got together with the gardening club members to brainstorm for economical and eco-friendly ways to complete the garden setup.

"Other than buying soil and the occasional species of rare flower or plant, everything else is 100 percent recycled," says Shirley's younger brother, 41 year-old Kok Liang, who works as an assistant to a lecturer at the National Institute of Education.

For instance, the flowers lining the entrance are planted in leftover PVC water pipes from construction sites. A resting bench at one corner was donated by a friend (who has since moved out of the neighbourhood) while discarded bamboo poles and parts of old baby cots are now makeshift fences for climbing plants.

It also helps that 67 year-old Mdm Teng Jing Lan, a member, works as a cleaning lady for some of the blocks in the area.

"If a flat is undergoing renovation, I will look out for disposed mosaic tiles to use as pathways for our garden," she says, proudly adding that old water features she salvaged have found a new lease of life in the garden.

There are nearly 80 species of plants and flowers – including papayas, Japanese cucumbers, eggplants, carrots, roses and sunflowers. New varieties will keep coming in, because "neighbours will transfer their dying plants and flowers to our garden – especially during the Chinese New Year period – and then take them back after they start blooming!" says Mdm Teng, with a laugh.

Reaping A Friendship Harvest

Shirley knows that she can count on the 30-plus members – including regulars and those who come whenever they can.

Once, they learned that the drainage systems (in the vicinity) were to be renovated, which meant that the stone tiles covering drains would be discarded.

"So forming a human assembly line, we carried the tiles, washed the dirt off them and laid them as pathways for our garden."

Bonding over a common love for nature has resulted in Shirley and her family – as with the other members – forming close-knit relationships with fellow gardeners of various races.

Members gather for delicious multi-cultural potluck sessions and plans are also underway to organise a *makan* session which will see delectable dishes cooked with plants grown in their Garden Of Happiness.

Adds Kok Liang, "Once, I overheard a parent telling her child 'See? Lady's Fingers are leaning plants that grow upwards and need support from those bamboo poles.'



Two of the many plant species you'll find in the Garden of Happiness

"There's a wealth of knowledge that the elderly can impart to our younger generation. That's why we hope to start an interest group for parents and their kids to plant together too." Passion is what keeps the garden blooming.

Shirley adds, "Our hope is to create an environment for neighbours to interact with one another and bring about harmony in the community. That way, any dispute can be put aside or settled once they step into this little garden paradise."

SOW SEEDS OF LOVE

Got a green thumb? Use your gardening skills to grow stronger bonds with your neighbours.

- 1 Make a greeting card for them out of a dried, pressed leaf
- 2 Grow a flower for a special occasion. For example, daisies for a fifth wedding anniversary
- 3 Offer to water their plants when they are away
- 4 Organise an educational tour of the community garden

Forget the Internet — open your door and you'll find a whole community waiting at your doorstep.

Online communities like Facebook and Twitter are popular avenues to connect with and to meet people. Step outside though, and you might find your precinct — a cluster of public housing blocks arranged as a single unit — more alike to a social networking website than you would expect.

Network Expansion

Take our communal void deck for example. It may look like just another empty space, but it's known to bring people together through weddings celebrations and birthday parties. Neighbours also gather at night markets also known as *pasar malams* — almost similar to how we “gather” on Facebook to challenge and interact with our friends through gaming communities such as Bejeweled Blitz and Farmville.

Remember hearing stories of people finding true love online after wandering into a chat room to strike up a random conversation? For Denise Pinto, a void deck encounter in Bishan was comparable. “Five years ago, I bumped into my neighbour who was hanging out at a table at my void deck on the way home,” the 27 year-old marketing coordinator says. “I went over to say hi, and was introduced to a cute friend he was with.

“We hit it off, exchanged numbers, and you could say the rest was history.”

The Latest Buzz

Log into Twitter, and you'll get all sorts of updates and news from the people and friends you follow. Serangoon resident Julie Susanto “logs in” at least once a day. The only difference? Her information



Step up, Reach Out

stream comes in the physical form of a covered linkway.

“I always bump into other housewives going to and from the market for groceries in the mornings,” says Julie.

“What is normally a 20-minute trip can stretch to over an hour when we trade stories. You'd be surprised at how much goes on behind closed doors around here.”

One story the 59 year-old housewife lets on would definitely have been a trending topic on Twitter: “There's a neighbour who's colour-blind,” says Julie. “Because of this, his wife helps him pick out and match his work clothes.

“We'll know exactly when they've had an argument just by looking at his clothes. The colour selection of his attire will be mismatched and really gaudy — we once saw him in a pink shirt and brown pants!”

Join Our Group

Gossip aside, other precinct facilities can be likened to social networking tools as well. Facebook groups are created to provide like-minded people with a place to congregate regularly. The pavilion shelter in Punggol Park acts just like a Facebook group for Jason Wee.

“Growing up, it [the pavilion shelter] was where my secondary school mates and I would always hang out, whether it was after a football game, or just to pass the time,” says the 20 year-old polytechnic student. “Now that we're in different schools and courses, we still get together there every weekend to catch up over a game of football.”

Tampines resident Lee Han Ming found two new friends at the drop-off porch of his block. “I take a taxi to work at the Changi Business Park every morning, and it's rather pricey (\$7.50) with the peak hour surcharge,” says the 28 year-old IT engineer.

“But back in November 2009, I started a conversation with two other neighbours waiting for a cab at the porch, and found out that they work at Changi Business Park as well. We've been meeting almost every morning since and sharing the cab fare three ways definitely helps to ease the burden on our wallets!”

Whether it's making new friends, finding out the latest happenings, or even discovering a great bargain deal, consider how your precinct facilities offer options as fun as the online ones. The next time you decide to camp in front of your computer, just remember — there's a world just as big outside.

STAY CONNECTED

If you have a query, chances are someone out there has an answer for you. Here are four sites to check out

1 HEARTLAND BUZZ URL: heartlandbuzz.hdb.gov.sg

What does it take to be a better neighbour? Want to know which educational outreach programme to enrol your child in? This online community for HDB residents helps answer these questions and more. There are also shopping guides to malls, games for the kids, and an events calendar that lets you know what HDB has in store for you.

2 MYHOMETOWN.SG URL: www.myhometown.sg

This site, set up by some homeowners to recreate the

kampung spirit of old, divvies up the forum threads by all 28 postal districts – with sub-categories like “Food” and “Schools” – for easy reading. There is also a lively forum.

3 SG-HOUSE.COM URL: www.sg-house.com

Whether it is a dream flat or a temporary rental you are after, SG-House.com will help to narrow down your search. Hunt for a home within your desired price range, size and district, or look through categories like “HDB for Sale”.

4 RENOTALK.COM URL: www.renotalk.com/forum

Thinking of dressing up your flat differently, but not sure how to start? Check out this renovation-based community. Discover the do’s and don’ts when it comes to giving your place a makeover under “Housing Rules, Policies and Procedures”, or find an affordable package in “Renovation Firms and Services”.

Come together and celebrate HDB’s town planning efforts by hanging out at your neighbourhood coffee shop or fitness corner with your fellow residents.



One million and there’s more to come! Yes, you heard right. Fifty years since its inception, the Housing Development Board has added another feather to its cap – its millionth flat in December 2010.

It’s by far no mean feat – we’re a population of 5,076,700 people (and growing), and yet, our neighbourhoods aren’t claustrophobic clusters of brick and cement.

Change Of Plans

It’s not by sheer luck that our public housing estates don’t resemble dominoes waiting to be toppled. Back in the 1960s, a public housing estate layout was simple: neighbourhoods were ringed around the town centre. Each ring would be served by a neighbourhood centre, which included sundry stores, coffee shops and other facilities.

In the late 1970s, our estates were transformed, with more emphasis on design and aesthetics, to ensure that going high-rise did not result in concrete jungles. Instead of rings, clusters of flats were built.

This new approach made space for playgrounds and open spaces for sports so residents could come together. Schools and neighbourhood centres were also added and the juxtaposition



The sprawl before you is a local blueprint for residential success

FLAT FACTS

- 1 Annoyed by your mahjong-loving neighbours? The Treelodge @ Punggol looks to cut down pollution in every form, even sound. Designed to reduce noise transmission between rooms, the flats are fitted with the patented FerroLite partition wall system
- 2 If you're looking for some privacy, consider moving to Bukit Timah – with only 8,900 residents, it's the smallest HDB estate in Singapore
- 3 Looking for a room with a view? At 50-storeys, the Pinnacle@Duxton is HDB's tallest housing project, offering panoramic views of the city skyline
- 4 You don't have to travel all the way to Sentosa... Beach volleyball courts are now located in Bishan and Clementi for some fun in the sun

of low-rise structures against high-rise flats allowed the architects to accommodate an uneven landscape.

This mix of high and low-rise developments eventually formed what HDB termed a "checkerboard" principle of new town development. A recent example would be Buangkok.

Thankful for the sheltered walkway to the Buangkok MRT station on rainy days or the nearby Hougang Green Shopping Mall where you buy your groceries? Well, that's because Buangkok is made up of three separate precincts which have been integrated to provide seamless links from the blocks where you live to transport and commercial facilities like the MRT station.

Recreational amenities such as a common green, fitness stations and playgrounds are

also spread around the community mall.

Going Green

Moving forward, HDB will be embracing greener initiatives. The one millionth flat is located in Treelodge@Punggol – its first eco-precinct and a testing ground for new ideas in green technologies. Capitalising on this to raise awareness of environmental sustainability, HDB hopes to reduce electricity consumption in common areas by at least 30 per cent and in households by at least 10 per cent in five years.

So don't be taken aback if you notice the use of solar panels to generate light for common areas, centralised refuse chutes for recyclables as well as a rainwater collection system. Even the children's playground is made from recycled materials.



The Treelodge@ Punggol

The senior citizen residents are having the time of their lives together at their Golden Jasmine estate.



Memories Are Made Of These

Life begins at 55 and you only have to head to Block 152B at Bishan Street 11 to test this theory out.

Once there, you will find that there is no better person to meet first than Madam Susan Goh Jet Ee, a Golden Jasmine resident. The 62 year-old left Toa Payoh to move into Golden Jasmine in 2010.

These 176 units, specially built for purchase by Singaporeans aged 55 and above, make up the first ever housing project consisting only of studio apartments.

The More We Get Together

Mdm Goh, who's currently helping out as an administrative officer at an enrichment school, has over 40 years of community service experience. A keen gardener since she grew her first chilli plant 26 years ago, she was a natural choice as the head of Golden Jasmine's community garden.

"Life after retirement can get monotonous, so our focus is to help Golden Jasmine's residents occupy their time, and possibly, fight dementia with something they will enjoy," says Mdm Goh who also serves as the Chairperson of Toa Payoh South Community Club Women's Executive Committee.

At the small community garden, you'll often find elderly residents observing the growth of new buds, or just admiring the blooms from a nearby pavilion. Besides the garden, there is also an open-air park on the second floor, fitted with an exercise area – a therapeutic zone with reflexology trails for residents' enjoyment.

In the beginning stages of heading the garden, Mdm Goh engaged the help of fellow neighbour, Mr Chow Teng Lam, 66, to go on a door-to-door recruitment drive. Since then, they have found seven dedicated members to tend to the garden regularly. An increasing number of Golden Jasmine residents are also asking if they can join too.

With some members still holding part-time jobs, and others who are housewives with grandchildren-babysitting duties, everyone takes turns helping out. For instance, there is Mdm Swee Gek Ngoh, who used to volunteer at an Australian vegetable farm (her husband was posted for work there), and Mr Robin Chan, who worked as a gardener previously.

Both are in their mid-fifties and look forward to chatting with their neighbours and making new friends. However, the members do face minor hiccups like the lack of proper gardening tools



Madam Susan Goh Jet Ee with the fruits of her labour in bloom

and a direct water source, which mean members have to pay for seeds and soil from their own pockets, and take turns lugging heavy pails of water around.

Not that it matters, because "to see everyone putting their heart into this garden, using our bare hands to plant seeds and then watching them sprout – it's like nurturing our children and seeing them grow; we feel so proud," explains Mdm Goh, a mother of three.

From their first seed planted in December 2010, the garden is now resplendent with winter melons, pineapples, papayas, tomatoes, onions, aloe vera, lemongrass and sunflowers. By growing their own vegetables, the residents are taking a step towards reducing their carbon →

➔ footprint by not having to buy imported vegetables.

“I now know a lot more neighbours. Some even come to me with plant-related problems – I’ll always try my best to help!” says Mdm Goh with a laugh.

Golden Moments, Golden Years

Fuelled by the residents’ response to the garden, Mr Chow has also started a Qigong exercise group, where every morning you’ll find senior citizens from Golden Jasmine and adjacent blocks exercising together. After that, the group disperses, with some members heading off to work or to a nearby coffeeshop to chit-chat over breakfast.

Golden Jasmine held its first residents’ function to celebrate Christmas on 19 December 2010, when about 60 gardeners and Qigong enthusiasts came together for a potluck and barbeque session. The same group also went on a sightseeing trip to Resorts World Sentosa in late January this year, followed by some Chinese New Year shopping at wholesale factories.



Bishan residents starting off their day with a Qigong session

“It’s really satisfying to see more residents healthy, bonding, and everyone saying ‘hello’ when they meet each other,” says Mr Chow. “I hope this will inspire other Residents’ Committees in Bishan to start interest groups for senior citizens too.”

Adds Mdm Goh, “The garden is now flourishing, and very soon, I hope we’ll be able to say ‘this meal we are eating now comes from the very plants and fruits that we grew in our garden!’”

Note: HDB would like to thank NParks for its contribution to this story.

MADAM GOH SHARES SOME VALUABLE TIPS TO GET YOUR OWN GARDEN STARTED

- 1 Determine if a chosen plant is suitable for planting indoors or outdoors, as some plant varieties need more sunlight than others
- 2 Try starting with a money plant, as all it needs is to be potted in soil and watered once a day
- 3 Remember to trim off dead leaves regularly. Don’t pluck them but always use a pair of scissors

Work hand in hand with your neighbours to keep your estate spick and span with these tidy tips!



Let's Trash This Out

It’s not tough trying to liken keeping one’s estate clean to the dating game. The opposite gender is way more likely to be attracted to you if you’re presentable and neat, rather than sloppy and unkempt. The same goes for your home. Want more

relatives to come knocking? Make sure it’s warm and inviting, both inside and out.

The Right To Refuse

No girl would give a sloppy and untidy guy a second look no

matter how kind or charming he might actually be. This theory applies to your home as well.

Imagine your friends and relatives gossiping about the exterior of your flat even before stepping into your home. This makes it even more important for



you to keep the space outside your home clean too.

The area right outside your door is one shared by you and your neighbours and everyone has the responsibility to keep it neat and tidy. Tossing out your old junk? You can still keep the area spotless by not leaving any bulky items beside the chute even as you're getting rid of passé clothes from the '80s or last decade's Hello Kitty bedsheets. Take a further step by calling the town council* to dispose of your sofas or huge boxes for free, leaving the central refuse area uncluttered.

Lift Me Up

We are all attracted by scent, or in more scientific terms, pheromones, which explains the instant attraction and connection you feel when you first meet someone.

No one likes a stale-smelling mate and this is the same as our neighbourhood lift. We all spend more than 30 seconds in our neighbourhood lift and we love for it to be well-lit and smelling great all the time. Often than not, we are greeted with a slightly odd stench.

But why don't we play our part in keeping it spotless by paying attention to our own behaviour? Even after the trek to the wet market where we lug home our groceries, we can still play our part by making sure everything is properly bagged to avoid leakage. As sweaty and tired as we are, we can definitely afford a few more minutes till we reach home before sipping on that takeaway coffee, hence

minimising accidental spills, and keeping the area clean for all users.

Bin There, Done That

Dating is never about convenience, or most of us will be dating our neighbours. We are all willing to go the extra mile for our loved ones, like visiting their homes on the other end of the island or standing in line at their favourite bubble tea joint. So why not go the extra mile for our own estate?

C'mon, 'fess up if you're guilty of tossing rubbish into an almost full bin. At that point in time, it may seem way more convenient than walking to the next bin a couple of metres away, but on hindsight, did you ever think about the extra work cleaners have to put in when they clear our trash out?

Just by walking a few steps, you can do your part in making the environment and someone's life so much better. So, maybe it is time to make it your personal mission to stop balancing those discarded chicken rice packets on top of an already overflowing bin, or pushing junk mail from your insurance agent into an already full bin only to have it fall out onto the floor again.

Tie Up Loose Ends

When one relationship is over, it's time to move on to the next without any baggage. This means making sure that any remnant feelings get tied up properly and tossed away in the chute. This is almost like proper garbage disposal, which may sound like an easy task but it takes some tender loving care to do it well without it coming back to hurt you.

Throwing your leftovers down the chute in a loosely-tied plastic bag is not going to cut it. Imagine the leftovers from your dinner falling out along the way, staining the chute and creating a mess at the end of the tunnel.

What's even more dangerous is getting rid of sharp objects like broken pieces of glass without

wrapping them in newspaper. You may end up causing hurt to someone else without meaning to. Do your part and clean up after yourself by practising proper disposal techniques. Your little act will go a long way in ensuring that your neighbourhood stays spotless!

***Tip!** Try googling your town council for the number to call to remove bulky items.

Note: HDB would like to thank NEA for its contribution to this story.



TURN INTO CAPTAIN PLANET

Weed out recyclables from your trash and you're one step closer to saving the planet!

1

Save our land

With our limited land space, recycling items like paper, plastics, metal, glass and old clothing extends the lifespan of Singapore's one remaining landfill: Semakau Landfill

2

Decrease energy use

It's more efficient to produce items from recycled materials rather than out of new resources. For example, recycling aluminium cans saves 95% of the energy needed to make new ones

Moving from a condominium to a HDB flat might prove to be a new experience for some, but Bernie Utchenik has no complaints. Having moved into Yishun with his wife only eight months ago, the Founder and Director of American-style F&B chain Botak Jones is happy with the change. “I’ve all the amenities I need within walking distance, and the highway is nearby, so getting to work is easy,” he says.

A reason that stands out though is that he knows the neighbours in his Yishun estate.

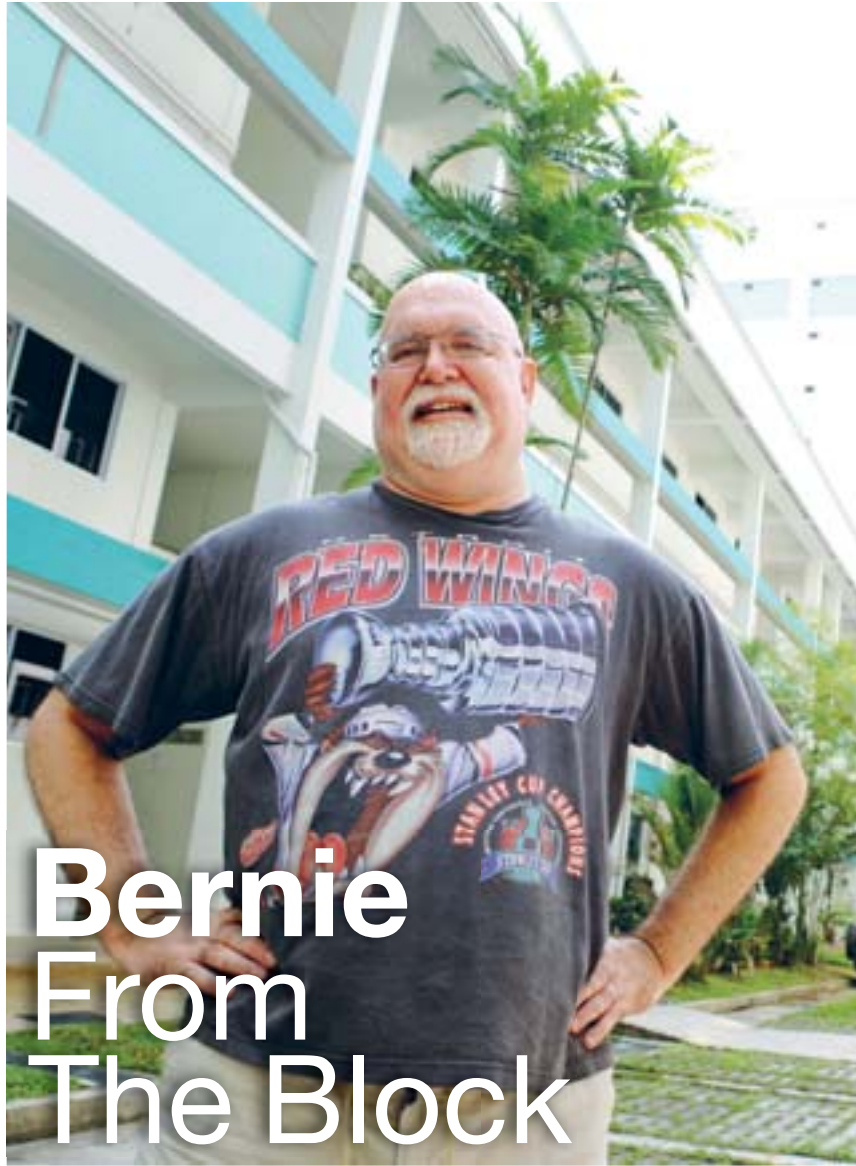
“Not that we didn’t know them back in our condo,” the 58 year-old explains. “But here, it feels like everyone’s more connected.

“For example, the provision shop in our condo wasn’t run by its residents. But people working in the stores and coffee shops around our estate could be the same people who live upstairs or next door.”

With the success of his first food stall in Tuas back in 2003, Bernie wanted to bring his concept of affordable, quality American food to the heartlands as well. “When people who had never been to Tuas started showing up at the stall, I realised that my business idea was on the money.”

Outlets sprang up around Singapore, from Ang Mo Kio to Clementi, and from Bedok to Serangoon. A dozen outlets later, the latest feather in Bernie’s cap is *Botak’s Backyard*, which opened in the upmarket Dempsey area in late 2010.

“In the beginning, I would approach customers myself to find out if they enjoyed the food,” he says. “I had to introduce myself as the owner first because they were always so shocked to have this huge *ang moh* (Hokkien for Caucasian) approach them suddenly. But after a while, both customers and staff alike began



Bernie From The Block

to understand that this is what we do – showing that we cared as much about the customers as we did the food.”

It’s these moments of interaction this Singaporean citizen of one-and-a-half years relishes. Especially since he doesn’t get to hang out and meet people around the estate often due to work commitments.

“I like to engage people,” he says. “And I find that easy to do in a HDB estate – approaching them, smiling, and asking them how they are.”

It’s this welcoming approach to people which might explain why Bernie is more than happy to be living next to a primary school. While others might not be fans of the shrieks and laughter of the students during recess periods, it’s a fond reminder for the Detroit native of his days growing up.

“Detroit offered a really eclectic mix of cultures – a lot like Singapore,” he says. “Watching the kids of different races at play brings me back to when I used to play with my neighbourhood friends as well.”

He's no stranger to bringing people together through good food. Now that he has brought authentic American cuisine to the heartlands, it's no surprise to find Bernie "Botak Jones" Utchenik living there either.



THE RESIDENT GOOD GUY

Bernie's five tips on being a nice neighbour

1 Greet your neighbours with a smile, followed by "good morning". It's a great way to start someone's day on a positive note

2 Be pro-active when you see someone who needs help. For example, if someone is carrying a load of groceries and heading towards the same block of flats, offer to assist

3 Park your vehicle considerately. Leave enough room for your neighbour to get in or out of their vehicle easily

4 Lead by example. Your courteous behaviour might not be reciprocated initially, but eventually, your efforts will be rewarded

5 Treasure your neighbours, even if you don't know them well. You might need their help some day



Life Storeys is a bi-annual publication by HDB.
Published by MediaCorp Pte Ltd.
Caldecott Broadcast Centre
Andrew Road, Singapore 299939

All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited.
Copyright © is held by the publishers.
Printed by KHL Printing Co Pte Ltd

For feedback and enquiries, email lifestoreys@hdb.gov.sg

Editorial Advisers:

Dy Director, Policy & Planning Leong Wai Han // *Head, Planning* Bettina Ng // *Community Relations Officer* Kaira Peh

Editorial:

Publishing Consultant: MediaCorp Pte Ltd // **Senior Editor:** Agatha Koh Brazil // **Writer:** Gene Khor
Designer: Patricia Fong // **Photographers:** Ealbert Ho, Kelvin Chia, Roy Lim // **Contributors:** Pamela Tan, Natalie Lee, Marie Wee
Account Manager: Michele Kho // **Managing Director:** Jessie Sng