



NUS Business School graduate Ng Kim Yong was a recipient of former member of Parliament Peh Chin Hua's Soh Ah Bak Memorial Bursary.

ST PHOTO FELINE LIM

PRO A MASTER IN THE BUSINESS OF LIFE

BY ANG YIYING

When Mr Peh Chin Hua, 70, is out and about, he sometimes meets strangers who ask him if he remembers them.

It turns out that some of them were recipients of bursaries he had handed out as a former three-term Member of Parliament for Jalan Besar GRC from 1988 to 2001.

Even though he has left politics, the businessman continues to be a strong supporter of education. Among other things, such as serving on boards of schools, he has also donated \$400,000 to help university students, of which about \$200,000 went to four bursaries – set up in his name and those of his parents and clan.

They include the Peh Chin Hua Bursary (set up in 2003), the Peh Boon Poh Bursary (named after his father and set up in 2009), the Peh Clan Association Kiew Sian King Bursary (set up in 2015) and the Soh Ah Bak Memorial Bursary (named after his mother and set up in 2015). To date, the bursaries have aided 70 recipients.

Bursaries are awarded to needy students, while scholarships reward academic excellence.

"I am not so keen to do a scholarship fund... I need to help those poor families," he said, adding that education would give underprivileged young people a leg-up, and they could in turn help their families be-

“You may get it (success) very fast but if you don't have the fundamentals to help you, you cannot sustain it for a very long time.**”**

Mr Peh on how to achieve long-term success

come more financially stable.

The different bursaries he set up benefit financially disadvantaged business school undergraduates of the National University of Singapore (NUS), an institution he feels a sense of affinity for. Not only did his three children, now in their 40s, earn their degrees there, it was also where he received his executive masters in business administration in 2002.

As a teenager, Mr Peh gave up his pursuit of education after sitting his A levels at River Valley Government Chinese Middle School (what is now River Valley High School) in order to help run his family's bookshop.

A talented painter, studying art overseas was his dream. But as the eldest of eight sons in a family of 11 children, he was duty-bound to his family. He recalled: "My father said, 'You cannot go to university. You have so many brothers and sisters. You need to take care of them.'"

So, he and two other siblings gave up the chance of furthering their studies to work in the shop. He said: "As the environment and the circumstances happened, I had no choice."

But looking back, he said he had no regrets. While he missed out on formal schooling, he never gave up learning – from picking up the ropes of running a business to becoming a successful businessman in his own right.

The bookshop grew into a chain and has since flourished and evolved

into book publishing business Shing Lee Publishers, now run by a younger brother.

Seeing the potential in China's growth in the 1990s, Mr Peh chose to venture into real estate development there. He started property company Dragon Land and helmed it from 1992 before selling it in 2005. He is now the executive chairman of White Group, a company he founded, which has properties and business interests in China and Singapore.

He attributed his success to hard work, sincerity and EQ (emotional quotient). His advice to young people was similar: "Be more sincere and work hard. And also treat your friends and families well. If you treat your friends and colleagues well, you will benefit."

As for Mr Peh's interest in art, he has continued to pursue it on the side. He has held charity sales of his paintings, with proceeds going towards various causes. He has also released five books, including compilations of his artwork and Chinese poetry he penned. A book that he plans to release in future would include teaching people how to do business in China, he said.

Observing that young people were keen to taste quick success, he encouraged them to build a strong foundation in what they do.

"You may get it (success) very fast but if you don't have the fundamentals to help you, you cannot sustain it for a very long time."