

‘Special’ place for NUS in Tony Tan’s heart

It was where he studied, built his first career and found his life partner

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It is the place where he studied, built his first career and even found his life partner. So it is no surprise that the National University of Singapore has a special place in the heart of former president Tony Tan Keng Yam.

“NUS is an institution that holds special significance to me, both personally and professionally,” he said at an appreciation lunch yesterday held by the university for him.

Dr Tan was NUS chancellor from 2011 to earlier this year. The chancellor post, according to NUS Constitution, is filled by the president of Singapore.

His ties with the university go way back to 1959, when he was a physics student at the University of Malaya – the predecessor of NUS – at Bukit Timah campus.

In his first year, he met an arts undergraduate and fell in love. They married five years later in 1964.

“Both of us were hostelites, staying in Dunearn Road hostels in our first year. Subsequently Mary moved to Eusoff College while I resided in Raffles Hall just across the road from Eusoff. I think that was quite a good arrangement,” he said.

After graduation, Dr Tan maintained a close relationship with NUS. He began his teaching career in 1964 in the physics department and subsequently the mathematics department. He left the university in 1969 to pursue a career in banking and later, politics.

Dr Tan returned to NUS in 1980 to become its youngest vice-chancellor at the age of 40.

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Former president Tony Tan and his wife Mary with (from left) NUS deputy president (academic affairs) and provost Tan Eng Chye; NUS Board of Trustees chairman Hsieh Fu Hua; former NUS chairman Wong Ngit Liong; and (far right) NUS president Tan Chorch Chuan and his wife, Dr Evelyn Tan, at the appreciation event yesterday. ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

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DR TONY TAN KENG YAM, on his ties with the university which go way back to 1959.

tions they lead,” said Dr Tan.

“NUS has come a long way from my days as a student here. The transformation has been amazing,” he said, adding that NUS has done well in becoming a “world-class univer-

sity that is widely respected for its excellence in education and research”.

NUS president Tan Chorch Chuan said Dr Tan had been a pillar of support as chancellor, as the university sought to develop further in educa-

tion, research and enterprise.

His leadership created the environment for NUS to embark on initiatives such as the University Scholars Programme and the overseas colleges, Prof Tan said.

“It also allowed NUS to nurture and recruit top academics and build world-class research strengths.”

Dr Tan was also the main driving force behind the setting up of NUS Enterprise, its entrepreneurial arm.

Prof Tan said as a politician, Dr Tan had made key contributions to higher education in roles such as education minister and minister-in-charge of NUS and the former Nanyang Technological Institute.

Dr Tan said he had witnessed tremendous growth at NUS, from the opening of University Town to pursuing research that addresses societal needs. “Mary and I will continue to follow closely NUS’ continued progress and development – but now as NUS alumni,” he said.

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