

Nursing hostel's past back to life

NTU medical school launches book to mark 90 years of ex-hostel's life

By CALVIN YANG

CHRISTMAS parties were lively and at times wild affairs for doctors, nurses and students of the medical hostel near Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH).

Medical staff, some decked out in fancy dress costumes and others sporting paper hats, would sing and dance to live music in the halls of the medical hostel at 11 Mandalay Road. On one occasion, a few male doctors came dressed as ladies and danced in Hawaiian costumes.

For Professor Chew Chin Hin, 83, a medical superintendent of TTSH in the late 1970s, the lively Christmas parties of the 1960s to the 1980s were popular events. Some years, more than a hundred staff attended.

"It was like a hospital party. For one or two years, we even had a Santa Claus," said Prof Chew, an adjunct professor of medicine at the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine.

"Sadly, hospitals now have become too large for such events," he said.

Prof Chew's recollections, and those of TTSH staff and students who used to live at the hostel, have been documented in a book, which was launched yesterday.

Built in 1924, the former hostel modelled on the Palladian style is now the headquarters of the Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine.

It started out as the Straits Settlements Mandalay Road Hostel and became the Nurses' Hostel from 1955 to 1995. Then it was turned into TTSH's adminis-

tration and human resource office. It fell into disuse from 1999, until the latest restoration.

The book, 11 Mandalay Road, details the former hostel's transformation through 90 years, as told by its former occupants.

Some of the stories touch on air raids by the Japanese during World War II. The book also features about 100 photographs, including rare shots of students at the hostel from the late 1940s.

"The book celebrates the colourful history of the heritage building," said NTU president Bertil Andersson.

The medical school, NTU's joint venture with Imperial College London, took in its inaugural batch of students in August last year.

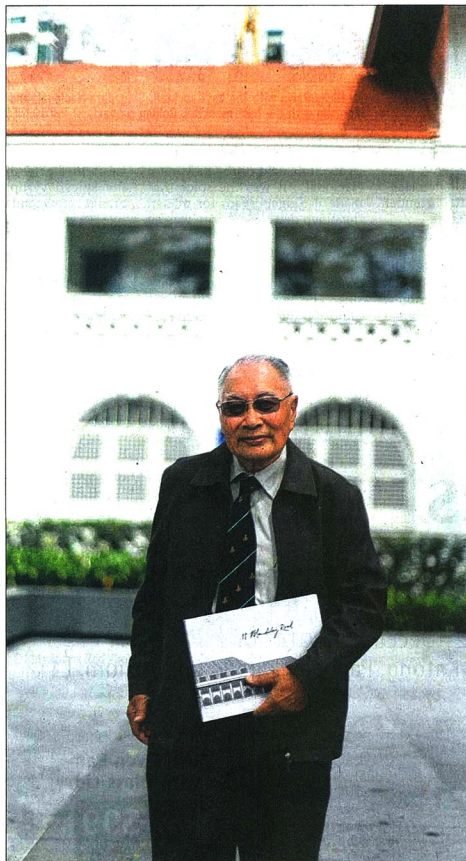
Its Novena campus comprises the medical school's headquarters and the upcoming clinical sciences building. These will form part of Health City Novena, the health-care complex which will be ready by 2030. The school also has campuses in Jurong West and one-north.

The Novena campus is near facilities such as TTSH (the school's primary teaching hospital), the National Skin Centre and the Communicable Disease Centre.

"Being near these health-care institutions strongly benefits the university's medical undergraduates as it ensures that they are closely integrated with the local health-care system," said Professor Andersson.

While the coffetable book is not for sale, copies will be available at the National Library and NTU's libraries.

calyang@sph.com.sg



Professor Chew Chin Hin with a copy of 11 Mandalay Road, in front of the building which inspired the book. ST PHOTO: CALVIN YANG