Lauded for decades of service

Jamiyah chief, 82, wins President’s Social Service Award; three groups also recognised

BY ANG YIYING

MR ABU Bakar Maidin wakes up at dawn regularly to walk 3km to 4km in East Coast Park.

By 8am, he is at work at the Muslim Missionary Society Jamiyah Singapore, starting a 12-hour day packed with meetings for the 18 social service programmes the organisation runs.

The Jamiyah president is 82.

Mr Abu Bakar’s involvement in community service began in the 1950s. He has helmed Jamiyah for 38 years, and in that time introduced services such as a free clinic and free legal counselling service for the needy.

For his long-term commitment to improving the lives of the underprivileged, he won this year’s President’s Social Service Award, the nation’s most prestigious recognition for volunteers, given out annually since 2001. He beat 40 other nominees in the category for individuals.

Mr Abu Bakar said he was honoured to get the award, but insisted it was also for his Jamiyah colleagues, because “I alone cannot do everything”.

The organisation has now $35 million in funds and assets, and its education, social and welfare programmes help up to 4,000 beneficiaries, about half of whom are non-Muslim.

The kitty is a long way from the $5.60 it had when Mr Abu Bakar was elected Jamiyah president in 1970. Back then, it set about raising funds and publicising its work by going from Kampung to Kampung to sell food fair coupons at between 10 and 50 cents each.

Mr Abu Bakar’s other priority then was to get the education programmes going because he believed education to be the key to progress and community development.

But as he was then holding down a full-time job at the advertising firm Leo Burnett, he carried out his volunteer work from 5.30pm to midnight, and used his annual leave to run Jamiyah projects.

Since retiring as Leo Burnett Singap-
pore’s finance director and company secretary in the early 1990s, he has thrown himself fully into working with Jamiyah. He does not draw a salary but gets a monthly allowance of about $700.

He smiles broadly when talking about his work, saying: “You feel very happy. That’s the reward you get. Money alone will not make you happy.”

He is a hands-on leader. Colleagues say he once stayed till 2am to oversee an exhibition being set up and was the last to leave on Hari Raya Haji when Jamiyah gave out food at its headquarters.

Retirement is not in his vocabulary, but he is in a hurry to “do as much as I can” for the organisation.

Along with Mr Abu Bakar, three groups also received awards from President S R Nathan at an Istana ceremony yesterday.

Among them was Nanyang Technological University Welfare Services Club. Its 700 members are involved in six regular projects, including weekly visits with 400 elderly, visually handicapped, hearing-impaired and intellectually disabled folk, as well as youth and children.

The club also mounted one-off projects such as a cookbook of 38 recipes contributed by elderly folk, titled Patchwork Of Flavours. The book, a showcase of the culinary talents of old folk, has sold 1,800 copies since last year.

The club’s vice-president Aveline Chio, 22, a final-year communication studies student, said the award will keep the club’s members motivated.

Standard Chartered Bank clinched the award in the corporate category. Its “Living with HIV” public education programme has reached 35,000 people here with its messages of safe sex and empathy for HIV patients.

Since 2004, the bank’s staff members here have also raised $500,000 for “Seeing is Believing”, a programme which funds eye operations for the needy worldwide.

The bank has, since 2006, given its staff two days’ leave a year to do volunteer work, which has helped up to one-fifth of its 5,500 employees here become active volunteers.

The Singapore Civil Defence Force was also a group winner. Its officers worked with 18 non-profit groups by cleaning their premises and running emergency training for the staff of its adopted chari-
ties, among other things.

The President’s Challenge 2008, which has seen 25,000 participants and raised $25 million, is expected to see $25 million raised and $20 million spent.

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