

HAPPY HANDS

Building An Endearing Home



NParks volunteer
artist Tham Pui San
on appreciating nature
through art

Our senior Heartland
Ambassadors embrace
active living through
volunteering

Student volunteers play
Cupid to help prospective
pet adopters find their
'Pawfect Match'

An exclusive interview with Dr Liu Thai-Ker

Remembering

MR LEE KUAN YEW

A man of clarity and courage

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Image: HDB

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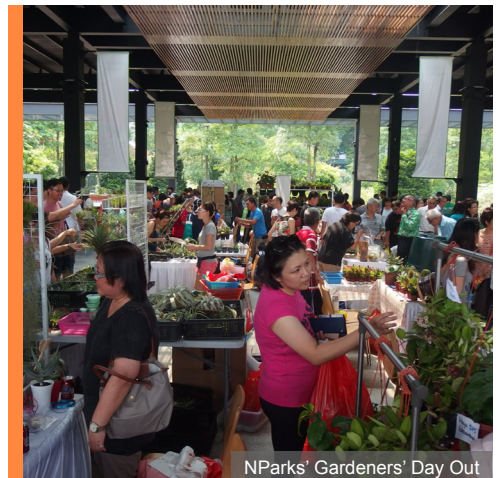
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Image: HDB

“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” – Isaac Newton

With the recent passing of Singapore's first Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the MND Family mourned the loss of our Chief Gardener, Chief Planner, Chief Architect and Chief Builder. Mr Lee's life's work was fuelled by a passion and love for Singapore. Even in the days when our future seemed uncertain, he had a vision to transform Singapore into a world-class tropical oasis in the region. Some of Mr Lee's lasting legacies include our public housing programme, a strong and dynamic economy, lush beautiful greenery for all to enjoy, and a clean Singapore River with bustling activities along its banks. Even the Marina Barrage, which opened in 2008, is a result of Mr Lee's vision two decades ago when he envisaged damming the mouth of the Marina Channel to create a freshwater reservoir and boost our water supply.

In the days following his passing, united in grief and gratitude we lined the streets to pay our last respects to a founding father of our nation. We discovered a collective capacity for patience, compassion and kindness - a glimpse of the best version of ourselves. As we move forward, we can all continue to play a part in making Singapore better and stronger, even in our own little ways and within our own communities.

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SHARE A STORY

Share a story with us today! We would love to hear your inspiring stories and personal journeys about volunteering with the MND Family. Whether it is in the form of an article, an illustration or a photograph, we welcome your contributions. Do drop us a note at happyhands@mnd.gov.sg!

FEEDBACK

Tell us how we are doing! Did we meet your expectations? Do you have suggestions that could help us make this newsletter interesting and relevant to you? Let us know via happyhands@mnd.gov.sg!



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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Remembering Mr Lee Kuan Yew: A man of clarity and courage

Dr Liu Thai-Ker, 77, Chairman of the Centre for Liveable Cities, shares his memories and thoughts on Mr Lee Kuan Yew



Mr Lee Kuan Yew was a young Prime Minister of a young nation. Yet, he dared to do many things against world trends. I used to ask myself where he got his courage from. Finally, I realised: clarity equals courage.

*Dr Liu Thai-Ker
Chairman, Centre for Liveable Cities*

A renowned architect and urban planner, Dr Liu Thai-Ker has greatly influenced Singapore's public housing and urban landscape since 1969, when he joined the Housing & Development Board (HDB) as an architect-planner. He went on to become Chief Architect in 1975 and Chief Executive Officer from 1979 to 1989. During his time with HDB, Dr Liu oversaw the development of 24 new towns and more than half a million housing units. Between 1989 and 1992, Dr Liu led the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) as Chief Planner and Chief Executive Officer, where he oversaw a major revision of Singapore's 1991 Concept Plan to better meet the needs of a growing population.

Dr Liu currently serves as Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC). CLC's work includes recording the experiences of Singapore's thought leaders and urban pioneers such as Mr Lee Kuan Yew, his colleagues, and many civil servants who had worked hard to put Singapore on a path of progress. CLC captures their experiences and lessons and shares them in ways that would be useful for leaders and planners to build upon for the future.

Could you share some memorable encounters with Mr Lee from your time with HDB/URA?

During my time with HDB, I accompanied Mr Lee on site visits to HDB's latest estates a few times a year. We also had one-to-one lunches at the Istana a few times a year. During these meetings, Mr Lee asked about the latest developments in HDB and raised ideas on policy matters. If I found a suggestion of his unnecessary or unsuitable, I would explain and he would accept my reasoning immediately. These encounters left me with the impression of Mr Lee as a highly rational person, one who didn't let ego stand in the way of reason.

Once, during a site visit, Mr Lee commented that he liked the raised turf between HDB blocks and complimented the design. In fact, back at HDB we had been trying to resolve the problem of these green spaces which used to be flat as they would sink slightly to form shallow troughs after six months. And when it rained, this created problems of waterlogging, mosquitoes breeding and a layer of black soil left behind after the rain.

After internal discussions we had decided to raise the turf to accommodate the slight sinking after six months. This allowed rainwater to drain off the turf instead of ponding and causing all those problems.

I had never mentioned this to Mr Lee, yet he noticed the raised turf area and complimented how the design made the urban environment look more natural. I was taken completely by surprise! This was the extent of his attention to detail and the degree of care he had for the quality of the living environment.

Another memorable encounter came after I had left the civil service, when I was asked to help the government engage a designer for the Supreme Court. After interviewing a selection of candidates, the panel which consisted mainly of High Court judges and myself, decided to appoint Norman Foster as the architect. Two weeks later, we received the news that Mr Lee had some reservation about our choice. Still, I was confident in our choice. Together with the judges, we decided to try to convince him.



Dr Liu Thai-Ker (far right) with Mr Lee Kuan Yew in Ningbo, China

Halfway through our attempt to explain the reasons behind our selection, Mr Lee banged his hand on the table and said, "Liu Thai-Ker, you are a good salesman. I agree with you. Go ahead with your choice." And so we did, and it turned out to be a very good choice. I consider this my most memorable moment with Mr Lee. This incident reinforced my view of him as someone who was frank in his disagreement but prepared to listen to rational arguments and open to changing his mind.

Many things have been said about Mr Lee, both compliments and criticisms. What do you think about some of these comments?

What struck me most about Mr Lee was that he was always thinking ahead. He observed situations and anticipated the needs and problems that could arise around the corner. Then he formulated strategies to solve the problems before they even appeared. Sometimes, people did not understand why certain policies needed to be implemented because they could not foresee these problems. So instead of receiving credit for averting problems, Mr Lee sometimes got blamed and accused of being high-handed.

For example, the policy to clear squatter settlements and rehouse residents faced resistance at first. But when people saw that their relatives and friends had moved to better living environments, they also wanted that. In the end, this policy improved the quality of life of the vast majority of Singaporeans.

Another example of Mr Lee's foresight and preventive action is the Ethnic Integration Policy. If we had allowed ethnic enclaves which were starting to form in housing estates to continue, the population would become segregated and create a lot of problems. Instead, we now have a mix of ethnicities in all our estates which averted those problems and have led to a genuine sense of 'Singaporean-ness'.

Which of his policies in public housing and urban development do you feel have had the most impact on Singapore?

Mr Lee's decision to provide decent housing for everyone was an earth-shaking policy. Very few cities around the world, including in the developed countries, have been able to match what we have done in Singapore.

HDB started off building public housing to rent, but by 1964 Mr Lee and his Cabinet colleagues decided to promote home ownership for all even though this was deemed hardly achievable anywhere in the world. But Mr Lee was very clear that for Singapore, as a young nation, it was important that every citizen has a tangible stake and a sense of ownership in the country. This policy also entailed building a high-rise and high density urban environment to ensure that we could house every citizen in land-scarce Singapore.

These policies defied world trends at the time. But by 1985, Singapore had achieved four things: we had no squatters, no homeless, no poverty ghettos, and no ethnic enclaves - in 25 years, a short period of time.

What advice would you share with young Singaporeans, many of whom never met Mr Lee but whose lives he influenced through not just his policies but also the principles he stood for?

The biggest lesson I learnt from Mr Lee and the advice I would give to the younger generation is to have clarity of thought. Observe carefully to know the needs and anticipate the problems. Once you are clear, you will have the courage to see your actions through regardless of world opinions.

While we must be open to learning and understanding differing viewpoints, we should be careful not to be swayed by fashionable trends and sexy sound bites which might ultimately not be in our best interests.

In Singapore, the highest authority is not the Prime Minister or the President - it is Truth. Over and above personal feelings and opinions, everyone respects the Truth. I think this has accounted for the country's exceptional achievements over the years.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Appreciating nature through art

Tham Pui San, 68, has been volunteering at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve for 13 years and enjoys sharing his passion for nature and art with others

Tham Pui San began volunteering at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (SBWR) in 2002, and has been volunteering with the National Parks Board (NParks) ever since. A passionate volunteer, Mr Tham is an accomplished nature guide and artist who conducts guided tours at SBWR and other parks and gardens, as well as art workshops for students and members of the public.

How did you start out painting natural landscapes?

When I was in primary school, I loved the outdoors and drawing what I saw around me, such as insects and flora. Some of my favourite pastimes included playing in the kampong fields and backyard vegetable plots. When I got older, my family and I moved to high-rise housing. I missed the outdoor activities greatly. The desire to relive my childhood days amongst nature and greenery prompted me to seek ways to express these carefree and liberating experiences in a tangible and creative form. Using art to capture nature subjects was the way to go.

What motivated you to become a volunteer artist at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve?

In February 2002, I was painting a scene at a pond when I heard a splashing sound nearby. To my surprise, a family of five otters were frolicking in the water and chasing fish right before my eyes. That sighting opened my eyes to the native animals that can be found in Singapore. Feeling so happy and privileged to have witnessed that, I decided then and there that I had to do something for the environment. That was when I signed up as a volunteer artist at Sungei Buloh.

Who are the usual participants at your Paint Along sessions?

The sessions started in late 2002. They were meant for visitors who wish to learn landscape and nature sketching and painting. Often, parents bring their children along. We also see art students and retirees who are interested in taking up an engaging hobby. A participant who comes to mind is a father who occasionally attends the sessions with a group of children. He is a proud father of 13 children ranging

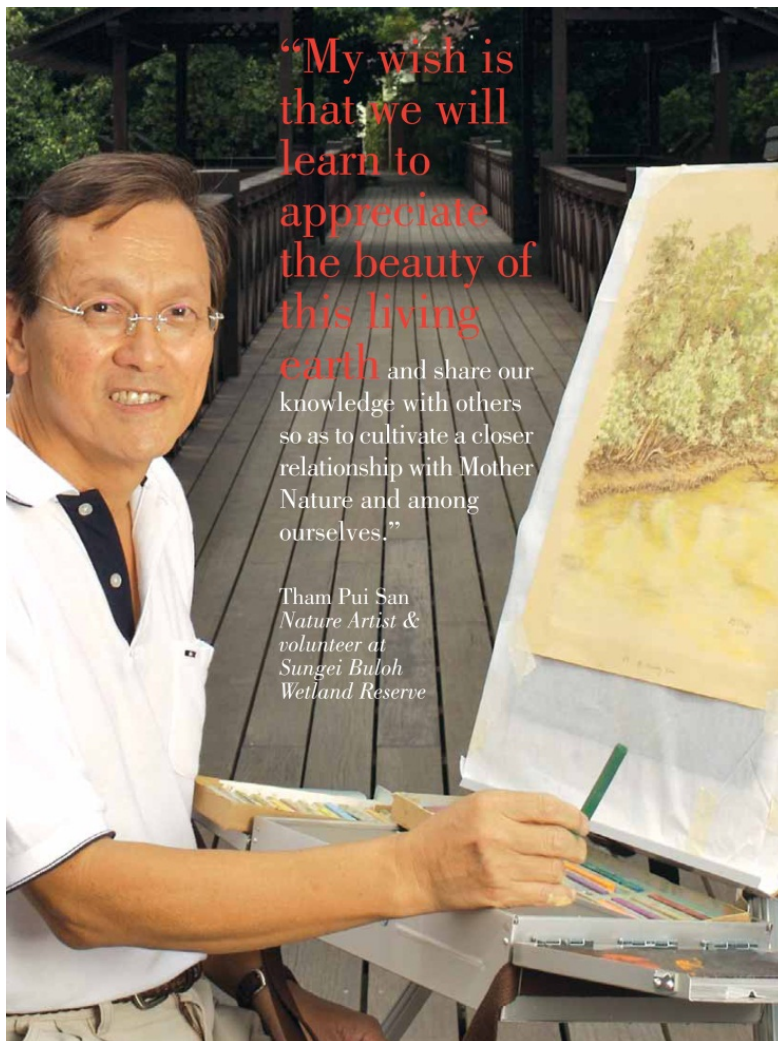


Image: National Parks Board



Image: National Parks Board

Mr Tham presenting an original artwork to Minister of State for National Development Desmond Lee at the opening of the SBWR extension on 6 Dec 2014

from three to about 15 years old and enjoys bonding with his children through nature and art. Some participants have been with me for many years and are still enjoying the outdoor art sessions.

What are some memorable encounters you have had?

When we paint outdoors at Sungei Buloh, we get to enjoy special moments of animal sightings such as the appearance of rarely seen Common Flameback Woodpeckers, and the ever so happy Smooth-coated Otters. Spotting a crocodile is also an incredibly exciting experience! The migratory birds during the winter months are a seasonal visual treat for all and make good subjects to sketch and paint.

Tell us about the Jezebel Artists group that you started at HortPark for volunteers and gardening enthusiasts.

The Jezebel Artists group was started about 3 years ago at HortPark. Members are mostly volunteers but drop-ins are free to join in. Participants get to appreciate nature through art by learning how to draw and paint flora and gardenscape there. Usually we start off with a demonstration of drawing techniques and learning how to compose scenes, before heading outdoors to paint. Members are also called upon to help run art-related activities at HortPark. This includes painting artworks on wooden fencing and small murals on walls, as well as making handicrafts at garden festivals.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

When participants create an artwork on their own and enjoy the process, no matter how much the artwork might resemble the real thing, it is a true accomplishment as there is no other artwork like it. When they feel good about sharing their work with me or others, I feel that I have succeeded in sharing my skills with them. The very act of capturing nature in artwork is evidence of their appreciation of our natural heritage. I'm glad when participants learn not only how to paint nature and landscapes, but also to appreciate and help conserve the environment.

Visit Mr Tham's personal blog at [here](#).

Find out more about his art sessions and other NParks' workshops [here](#).



Image: Tham Pui San

A recent painting by Mr Tham depicting migratory shorebirds at SBWR



Image: Tham Pui San

Children having an outdoor art lesson conducted by Mr Tham at SBWR

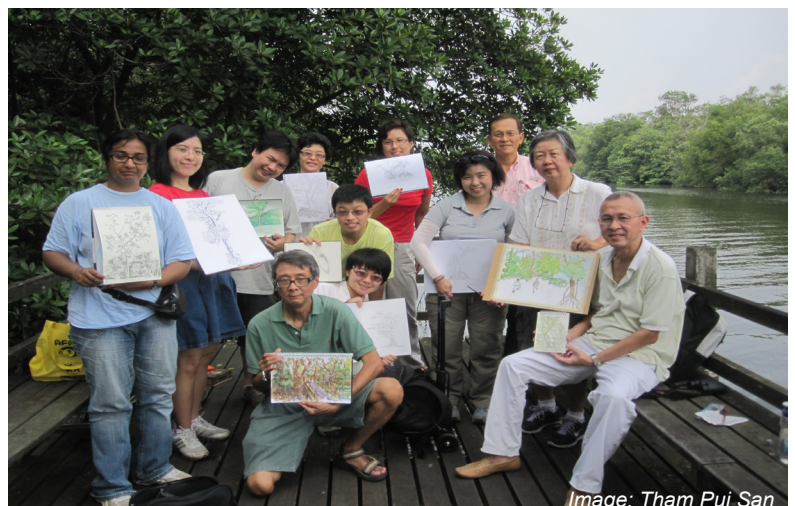


Image: Tham Pui San

Volunteering has enabled Mr Tham to share his passion for art and nature with others

PROGRAMME (HDB)

Active living through volunteering

Meet some of our Heartland Ambassadors who show that age is no barrier to contributing to the community

Mrs Iris Chua, Ms Rose Kong, Mr Gary Siriniwas and Mr Choo Guan Ann are seniors who play an active role in their communities. Participating in community programmes organised by the Housing & Development Board (HDB), they find meaningful ways to share their knowledge and passion with other residents and the younger generation.



Community Gardening Ambassador Mrs Iris Chua with a prized winter melon

Fostering community spirit through gardening

Mrs Iris Chua has been volunteering as a Community Gardening Ambassador since the Wu Wo Yuan Community Garden started in 2008. In 2011, the Wu Wo Yuan Community Garden became a part of the Community in Bloom in the Heartlands collaborative project between HDB, National Parks Board (NParks) and Residents' Committees. The garden at Block 609 Hougang Avenue 8 has grown from a 4-person team to a tight knit family of over 30 members today.

Besides providing an activity and a meeting place for elderly residents, the community garden is also a platform for educating the young on gardening and nature. "Wu Wo Yuan gives the school children an opportunity to get closer to nature in this concrete jungle," Mrs Chua proudly stated, which is another way that the community gardeners see their efforts being recognised by the community. The community garden was adopted by Xinmin Primary School in 2011.

As part of their 'Garden Harvest for the Community' project in 2014, the residents and students harvested and distributed their harvest at the nearby Senior Citizens Corner where they prepared breakfast with the fresh ingredients and shared it with the community. With the abundance of vegetables during harvest time, volunteers help to distribute Wu Wo Yuan's vegetables to the needy elderly in the neighbourhood once a month.

"A lot of people in our neighbourhood walk by Wu Wo Yuan daily," Mrs Chua described fondly, "there is now a sense of attachment to this garden."



Wu Wo Yuan community gardeners and Xinmin Primary School students



Ms Rose Kong (second from left) with students from Pioneer Secondary School on the Punggol Eco-Town Tour

Sharing the past with the younger generation

A retiree who gives free singing lessons to children, Mr Gary Siriniwas felt that it was important for the younger generation of Singaporeans to understand the difficulties of their forefathers and not to take our comfortable living conditions for granted. During the HDB Gallery tour he conducted for Spectra Secondary School students, Mr Siriniwas shared interactively how HDB blocks have advanced through the years.

"I remember the times when elevators only stopped at certain floors; we had to climb a few flights (of stairs)! But now, we have elevators that stop at every floor," he reminisced with a chuckle.

Inviting friends to share the joy of volunteering

An avid volunteer who looks forward to helping other elderly in the community, Ms Rose Kong also finds it worthwhile to share her knowledge of Punggol Eco-Town with students. She even brought old photographs of the place to aid her in explaining the transformation of the town. "Some questions asked by the students might be difficult to answer but I tried my best to explain. It felt really good to share what I knew," she said.

Ms Kong also felt that she can do her part to get more seniors to join the programme. "I have already introduced two of my friends to the HDB coordinator for this ambassador programme and my friends are very excited about it!"



Mr Gary Siriniwas (far right) leading a HDB Gallery Tour for Spectra Secondary School students



Mr Choo Guan Ann (far left) with two other Heartland Ambassadors during the Punggol Eco-Town Tour

Spreading the message on eco-living

Mr Choo Guan Ann was the past Chairman for the Punggol Meridian Residents' Committee. He also works part time as a licensed tour guide. When he heard about the Punggol Eco-Town Tour, Mr Choo was raring to go. He said, "When I found out that the HDB was organising the Punggol Eco-Town Tour I knew that I wanted to take the lead in this Eco-Learning Journey!" As the Eco-Town in Punggol is the first one of its kind in Singapore, Mr Choo felt that it was especially meaningful to volunteer as an ambassador.

This is an abridged version of the article originally published in HDB's community publication [Life Storeys](#). Text and images courtesy of HDB.

The HDB's **Heartland Ambassador Programme for Seniors** and the **Community in Bloom in the Heartlands** project were created to enable seniors to be active in communities by providing opportunities for them to share their knowledge with the younger generation and strengthen bonding among residents. Find out more about the community initiatives available at [Heartland Beat](#) or send an email to programmes@mailbox.hdb.gov.sg

PROGRAMME (AVA)

Finding the Pawfect Match

Student volunteers play Cupid at a speed-dating adoption drive for dogs jointly organised by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority and animal welfare groups



Images: Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority

Finding love is never easy, but on 22 - 23 March at Pet Expo 2015, 40 student volunteers comprising Veterinary Technology students from Temasek Polytechnic and Veterinary Bioscience students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic helped prospective adopters find their 'Pawfect Match' at a speed-dating adoption drive for dogs. Over 60 dogs from animal welfare groups were up for adoption at the event.

Taking on the role of Cupid Vollies, short for 'volunteers', the student volunteers facilitated the speed-dating rounds, which lasted 10 minutes each. During the dates, prospective adopters got the chance to interact intimately with the dogs.

The Pawfect Match event was organised by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) and seven animal welfare groups. Participating groups included Agency for Animal Welfare, Animal Lovers League, Causes for Animals Singapore, Humane Society (Singapore), Noah's Ark CARES, SOSD Singapore and Voices for Animals.

Visit [Pet Central](#) to find out more about AVA's Responsible Pet Ownership programme and how you can participate!

'Cupid Vollies' had to bridge the gap between the dogs and the prospective adopters. We facilitated their interaction and helped them to know each other as much as possible within a short time frame.

Cupid Vollie Melisa Lukito
Year 2 Veterinary Bioscience student
Ngee Ann Polytechnic

It feels good to be able to help these dogs find a family who would appreciate and love them as a family member.

Cupid Vollie Tan Kuok Jonn
Year 3 Veterinary Bioscience student
Ngee Ann Polytechnic

IN THE NEWS

Eco-mall tour for BiG Club Junior student ambassadors

Over 70 student ambassadors from the Building and Construction Authority (BCA)'s Build it Green (BiG) Junior Club went on an exclusive tour around Singapore's first eco-mall, City Square Mall, on the weekend of 11 and 12 March. Jointly organised by BCA and the Singapore Green Building Council, the students learnt about energy efficiency, water savings and the rainwater harvesting system, and participated in a mini quest inside NTUC FairPrice's flagship eco-friendly supermarket.

Find out more BCA's BiG Club and BiG Club Junior [here](#).

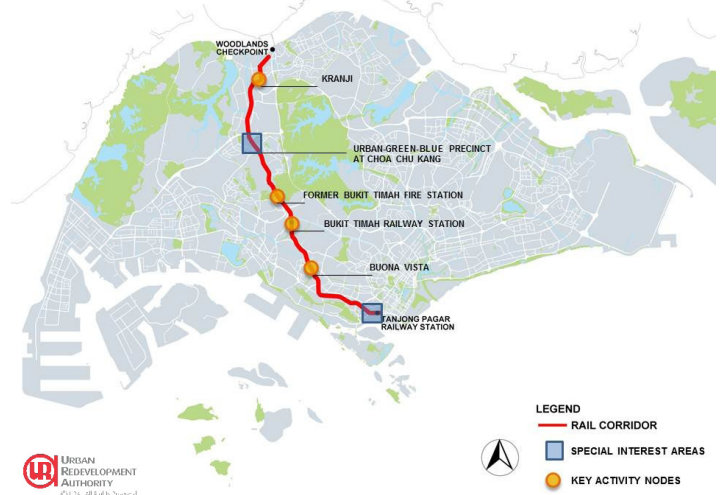


Students from BiG Club Junior playing a green edition of Snakes and Ladders

Rail Corridor - An Inspired and Extraordinary Community Space

The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has been engaging the community on the future of the 24-kilometre long Rail Corridor since the land was returned to Singapore in 2011. Together with ideas formulated by the Rail Corridor Partnership which was established in 2012 and involves interest groups, academics and design professionals, feedback gathered have been incorporated into the Planning and Design Goals in the URA's Request for Proposal launched on 18 March. These Goals will guide the conceptualisation and design of the Rail Corridor.

Visit [this portal](#) for more updates on the Rail Corridor.



Retaining the signature 'green corridor' experience is a key requirement of the Rail Corridor Request for Proposal

Learning and growing at Gardeners' Day Out

It was a beautiful day for gardening at the National Parks Board (NParks) quarterly Gardeners' Day Out at HortPark on 4 April. Gardening enthusiasts from all walks of life gathered for a fun-filled day of shopping at the Gardening and Food Bazaar, meeting like-minded enthusiasts at the Community in Bloom Plants and Seeds Exchange, and picking up tips and tricks for growing edibles from experts and long-time community gardeners. The young ones also enjoyed garden tours and workshops organised specially for them.

NParks' inaugural Community Garden Edibles Competition was also launched at this event. More details on this are available on the next page.



Gardening enthusiasts had a fruitful time at the Gardening and Food Bazaar held at HortPark Exhibition Gallery

UPCOMING EVENTS & CONTESTS

Community Garden Edibles Competition 2015

Are you or someone you know passionate about growing fresh fruits and vegetables in your home or community garden?

The inaugural Community Garden Edibles Competition is here to provide a friendly platform for gardeners to showcase their gardening talents and bountiful harvests!

Click [here](#) for more information and register by **30 May 2015**.



Images: National Parks Board

HDB Community Week 2015

22 - 31 May 2015, 9am - 9pm, HDB Hub Mall

Celebrate community spirit in the heartlands at HDB Community Week 2015 and see how you can be part of a vibrant community!

Learn more about the friendly faces and lively places in Toa Payoh, and the community design projects HDB has co-created with residents. Be awed by the exciting neighbourliness initiatives mooted by youths and get the first peek of our second pre-school storybook "Maddie's New Neighbours". Also, find out who the exemplary neighbours are under the Good Neighbour Award 2015!



Image: Housing & Development Board

Festival of Biodiversity 2015

27 - 28 June 2015, 10am - 10pm, VivoCity

Don't miss the SG50 species exhibition at the Festival of Biodiversity this year, featuring 50 fascinating plants and animals that are closely linked to Singapore's natural heritage.

Jointly organised by NParks and the Biodiversity Roundtable, the Festival is an annual celebration of the community's efforts to conserve Singapore's natural heritage. Other highlights include nature art and craft workshops, talks and nature film screenings by schools, nature interest groups and corporate groups.

Stay tuned to NParks activities and events [here](#).



Image: National Parks Board