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Her winning idea came from being 'Ms Kaypoh'

Writer thought of three-generation cooking contest after seeing lonely old folk in her estate

BECAUSE THEY CARED:

The New Paper's Sylvia Toh Paik Choo with her Intergenerational Bonding Award, which she won with her partner, Mr JF Susbielle.

PICTURE COURTESY OF SYLVIA TOH

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THE New Paper's very own Ms Sylvia Toh Paik Choo received an early and unexpected birthday present on Monday night.

She and her partner, Mr JF Susbielle, received the Intergenerational Bonding award, given by the Council of the Third Age (C3A) for their project, HandMeDown.

The awards ceremony was held in conjunction with the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes (ICIP) conference at the Pan Pacific Hotel.

The ICIP conference aims to raise awareness and understanding of intergenerational issues internationally. It is being held in Singapore for the first time.

Said Ms Toh: "This is probably the first and last trophy that we will receive. We're just not into contests."

She said it took seven months to get the project off the ground.

Part of the project, The Great Cookoff, saw teams consisting of three generations in a cooking contest.

The video of the contest, shot by Mr Susbielle, won over the judges and audiences.

During the dinner at the ceremony, delegates at the conference were asked to place coloured balls into the boxes of choice representing the six finalists.

Ms Toh said: "Our box had the most balls. A couple pointed it out to us and said that in America, that would mean you are the 'people's choice'."

Her idea for a three-generation cookout began from a simple observation.

She said: "I've lived in the heartlands all my life and because I'm a kaypoh person, I'm always looking out of my window to check out what's happening downstairs."

She noticed many elderly people sitting at void decks near her home in Pek Kio.

"They would be staring into space and hoping for another oldie to come and talk with them in dialect. They are not homeless folk.

"In their flats above, their Mandarin speaking grandchild would be stuck to their computer, downloading songs or doing their homework," she said.

"The parents, meanwhile, would be whipping up dinner after workday stress."

Mr Susbielle, who is French and who also wrote the score, said she should do something about it.

Ms Toh explained: "It's too late for me to lobby to be a Member of Parliament now!"

"So I tried the ministries and finally reached Council for Third Age, which is part of Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

"They really liked the idea. With the help of Family Life (People's Association), HandMeDown took off."

HandMeDown's tag is to preserve heritage, share tradition and pass on family values.

Said Ms Toh: "It sounds horribly cliched, but being one of the six finalists was already a win. Getting a trophy is really a bonus."

"And you can use it to hit him (Mr Susbielle) so that he'll do all the work," C3A's CEO Henry Quake told Ms Toh when he congratulated the couple on their win.

C3A had provided Ms Toh and Mr Susbielle with a seed fund for their project.

But does the age-related project make her feel, er, grey? After all, she is associated with cartoons, humour, fun and irreverence.

She said: "I may be of aunty age, but I'm actually an over-aged teenager, even though one of my editors, whom I shall not name, is always sending me to cover 'old' stories, since I am the 'oldest' person in the newsroom."

The self-dubbed "Silver Surfer" also mentioned that her friends were surprised with the success of HandMeDown.

But Ms Toh, who also wrote the rib-tickling books Eh Goondu! and Lagi Goondu!, was quick to mention that she did run up the stage to receive the trophy.

Ms Toh, who turns 64 today, also has this to say: "Our community project HandMeDown answers the Beatles' question, 'When I'm 64'."



TNP FILE PICTURE
TRY THIS, GRANDMA: One of the families that took part in Ms Toh and Mr Susbielle's project, The Great Cook-off competition, in which three generations cooked together.