

Media Release – For immediate use

Puan Noor Aishah to be inducted to Singapore Women's Hall of Fame

Singapore's first First Lady among 12 women honoured this year

19 March 2018 - She was just 26 years old when, in December 1959, she was thrust into the role of First Lady of Singapore. The shy, soft-spoken housewife, whose formal education had stopped in primary school, spoke no English and there was no handbook about being the First Lady.

But Puan Noor Aishah, wife of Singapore's first locally-born Head of State Yusof Ishak, more than rose to the challenge. In the 11 years that she was First Lady, as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in 2017 at the launch of her biography, 'she touched the lives of many with her quiet determination, humility and charm'.

Now in her eighties, Puan Noor Aishah will on Saturday 24 March be inducted to the Singapore Women's Hall of Fame (SWHF) at a gala dinner at Shangri-La Hotel. She will be presented with The Flame, the SWHF trophy, by President Halimah Yacob, who is patron of the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations. President Halimah was in the inaugural group of women inducted to the Hall of Fame in 2014.

President Halimah will also welcome 11 other women to the Hall of Fame. They are:

- Community workers Tan Teck Neo, Grace Yin, and Mozelle Nissim
- Businesswomen Anastasia Tjendri-Liew, Claire Chiang and Daisy Devan
- Lawyer Phyllis Tan
- Zoologist Yang Chang Man
- Biomedical scientist Miranda Yap
- Tour guide Geraldene Lowe-Ismail
- Sports club founder Zena Clarke Tessensohn.

The SWHF was launched by the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations in 2014 to recognise and celebrate the achievements and contributions of women in Singapore. A key aim is to share their stories so as to inspire others, especially young Singaporeans, to dare to dream and to chart their own path.

Professor Tommy Koh, who chairs the SWHF Selection Panel, said: "Sharing the stories of our outstanding women will help to give our youth role models of strong and successful women, and inspire them to live their lives fully, to develop their passions and to follow their dreams. All the 12 women being inducted this year have very inspiring stories, and we are delighted to have them join the 140 women already in the Hall of Fame."

Asked for her reaction to being honoured, businesswoman Claire Chiang said: "An award is recognition. It motivates me to reflect on my next leap, about what I should do more that is different and new to empower women. This energises me.

"This may be the value of the Hall of Fame. Besides remembering the women achievers and feeling grateful to them for their contributions in building Singapore, the Hall of Fame fuels our imagination, and that of future generations, about strengthening this legacy.

"Achieving gender parity is about growing the number of achieving women to a size that makes our influence and opinions matter. This is a journey that has to be earned through our perseverance and collective commitment."

Anastasia Tjendri-Liew said: "I feel very honoured to be recognised and would like to dedicate this to every woman who has struggled and sacrificed, and I thank everyone who has supported me through the years, and of course, the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations.

"I see this as a wonderful way to encourage and motivate women and to recognise women's efforts and achievements across the different fields and industries. It serves as a wonderful reminder that women can achieve just as much and be as accomplished as men."

The SWHF induction ceremony and gala dinner is held in March every year by the SCWO as part of the celebrations of International Women's Day. Guests at the dinner will include women already in the Hall of Fame, women parliamentarians, foreign diplomats, senior civil servants and representatives of SCWO's member organisations.

Short profiles of this year's 12 inductees and a SWHF fact-sheet are attached. The full profiles of SWHF honourees are available at swhf.sg

The Singapore Women's Hall of Fame Honourees of 2018

TAN TECK NEO

Philanthropist and pioneering community leader

Born: 1877 Died: 1978

In 1915, at a time when well-born Chinese women in Singapore were rarely seen in public, Tan Teck Neo led some 20 women in setting up the Chinese Ladies' Association. An early project was to run a tea stall to raise funds for the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance. It was, as a newspaper noted, the first time 'Chinese ladies have come forward to assist in a public charity or other function of that kind'. Teck Neo's father, businessman Tan Keong Saik, believed girls should be educated and arranged for his three daughters to be tutored at home. Teck Neo was a quick learner who also imbibed her father's forward-thinking, liberal values. In 1900 she married Lee Choon Guan, a widowed businessman and philanthropist. He and Teck Neo entertained lavishly and travelled extensively. They were in England during the First World War and Teck Neo volunteered with the Red Cross. She received the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in 1919 for her war-time services. Later, she set up the Mrs Lee Choon Guan Trust Fund to support charity and promote education and training for girls and women. Teck Neo was a key member of Singapore's high society for many decades. Her parties were legendary. In 1978, she celebrated – as she had vowed she would – her 100th birthday. Two months later, she died.

MOZELLE NISSIM

Grand Old Lady of Singapore's Jewish community

Born: 1883 Died: 1975

Mozelle Nissim was born in 1883, the second of seven children of Sir Manasseh Meyer, a wealthy businessman who was considered the leader of the Jewish community in Singapore. After her mother's death, Mozelle helped to raise the younger children, and when she became an adult she helped her father host the many social events he held at their large home in Oxley Rise. Like her father, Mozelle had a deep commitment to helping the community. In 1929 she founded the Singapore Jewish Women's League. For more than a decade, the League raised funds to help those in need with their rent, food, medical and schooling costs. When Sir Manasseh died in 1930, Mozelle became the de facto leader of the Jewish community. While her chief concern was with the Jewish community, Mozelle was often approached to help with Singapore's wider community needs and she readily responded. During the 1920s, for example, she worked with other prominent women to raise funds for the St Andrew's Mission Hospital. The Japanese Occupation brought an end to the League's work as many members of the Jewish community either fled Singapore or were interned. It found new form after the war, in 1946, when Mozelle and other leaders of the community set up the Jewish Welfare Board. Mozelle passed away in July 1975, just a month after turning 92.

The Singapore Women's Hall of Fame Honourees of 2018

GRACE YIN PEK-HA

Pioneering community worker

Born: 1884 Died: 1972

When Grace Yin married Dr Lim Boon Keng in 1908 and moved from Amoy, China, to Singapore, she brought to the Colony an independence and activism that was then rarely seen among women. Just 24 years old when she married the much older Dr Lim, Grace was a confident young woman who settled easily into Singapore society. In 1915, she was one of the founding members of the Chinese Ladies' Association (CLA). Grace was the association's first treasurer and a key mover of many of their activities, organising bazaars and other fund-raising efforts for charitable causes. The Lims moved to Amoy in 1921 when Dr Lim became President of Amoy University. Upon their return to Singapore in 1937 when the Sino-Japanese war began, Grace helped to organise many donation drives for the China Relief Fund, which her husband headed. When Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942, she was detained and tortured by the Japanese because of her work for the Fund. She was president of the CLA before the war, and in 1947 she led the effort to revive the association and resume its community work. In 1948 she was made a Justice of the Peace. She died in 1972, aged 88, from a stroke.

ZENA CLARKE TESSENSOHN

Founder of Singapore's first sports club for girls

Born: 1909 Died: 1991

In 1929, Zena Clarke Tessensohn and 11 other young Eurasian women who were keen to play competitive sports asked the Singapore Recreation Club, the all-male Eurasian sports club, to let women become members. The men said no. Fed up, the young women started their own club. The Goldburn Sports Club, open only to Eurasian girls, was launched. In 1930 it was renamed Girls Sports Club (GSC) and in 1931, having secured some land in Serangoon Road, it raised \$1,750 to build a clubhouse and sports facilities. Elected the GSC's honorary secretary in 1929, Zena remained in the post until 1942, when World War II put an end to the club's activities. The club restarted after the war with Zena as its president, a position she would hold for 44 years. In 1974, GSC lost its premises when the government took back the land. Bitterly disappointed, Zena and her members resolved to carry on even without their own premises. Membership, however, began to decline. Zena remained GSC president until 1991 when, aged 81, she stepped down. Some months later, she died. In her six decades at the club, Zena played a key role in popularising hockey, netball, tennis and other sports among the women of Singapore. The GSC finally ran out of steam in 1996 and was dissolved. But Zena's legacy lives on in the many women who excel in competitive sports in Singapore.

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DAISY DEVAN

Singapore's Mother Music

Born: 1928 Died: 2009

Singapore's local music industry's golden era was the 1950s and 1960s, when there was a proliferation of singers and bands performing live and on radio and TV and releasing records that sold well. At the heart of the business was Daisy Devan, who in 1957 was the first Asian to head a record label in Southeast Asia. It was Daisy who, as EMI's Artistes and Repertoire Manager in Singapore, discovered and nurtured the career of The Quests, arguably the most successful local group of that time. She also discovered Sakura Teng and Rita Chao, and helped to shape the careers of Anita Sarawak, Tracy Huang, and Sharifah Aini, amongst many others. Daisy was running the operations of a rubber company when she was head-hunted by recording giant EMI and sent for training in England. On her return, she set up Singapore's first record-pressing factory in Jurong and opened a string of retail outlets across the island. She also looked for talent, getting those that caught her eye and ear to come for auditions. Daisy retired from EMI in the early 1980s and, with her husband Albert Devan, then started and ran for many years one of Singapore's first health food stores. Following her husband's death, she led a quiet life. She died, aged 81, in 2009.

PUAN NOOR AISHAH

Singapore's first First Lady

Born: 1933

She was just 26 years old when, in December 1959, she was thrust into the role of First Lady of Singapore. The shy, soft-spoken housewife, whose formal education had stopped in primary school, spoke no English and there was no handbook about being the First Lady. But Puan Noor Aishah, wife of Singapore's first locally-born Head of State Yusof Ishak, more than rose to the challenge. She calmly went about transforming the character of the Istana, giving it a Singaporean flavour. She took English lessons. She organised receptions for visiting dignitaries and she got involved in a host of voluntary organisations and community activities. In 1964, the Government awarded her with the Distinguished Service Medal for her 'active and dedicated' interest in social welfare. Born in Selangor, Malaysia, in 1933, Noor Aishah grew up in Penang with her adoptive parents. In 1949, when she was 16, she married the much older Yusof bin Ishak, founder of the Malay-language newspaper Utusan Melayu. They lived a simple life for 10 years. When Singapore gained self-governance in 1959, Yusof Ishak was persuaded to become the Head of State, replacing the colonial Governor. Noor Aishah supported her husband in all he had to do as Singapore's President. When his health began to fail, she took on many of his social responsibilities. Upon her husband's death in 1970, Parliament voted to pay her a pension for life – the only First Lady to be so honoured and appreciated.

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PHYLLIS TAN POH LIAN

First woman president of the Law Society

Born: 1933

When Phyllis Tan completed her schooling at Raffles' Girls School in 1950, the principal, an Englishwoman, asked what she planned to do. Without any hesitation, Phyllis said she was going to study law. "Bloodsucker," was the principal's response. The disdain shown by the principal for the legal profession did not deter Phyllis. Her father was a lawyer, and as a child she knew that she too wanted to be a lawyer. Seventeen years later, in 1967, Phyllis was the only woman council member when the Law Society was established. She was re-elected to the council in 1974, 1975, 1977 and 1978. In 1979, she became the Law Society's president, the first woman to hold the post. Phyllis was active in legal education, giving tutorials as a part-time lecturer for conveyancing as well as advising on the syllabus for the Bachelor of Laws degree at the then University of Singapore. She was a member of the Board of Legal Education in the 1970s, and from 1970 to 1975 she was a member of the Law Society's Conveyancing sub-committee. In 2010, the Law Society presented Phyllis with the CC Tan Award, which is presented annually to the lawyers considered to best exemplify the ideals of honesty, fair play, and personal integrity.

GERALDENE LOWE-ISMAIL

Pioneering tour guide

Born: 1938

For nearly 50 years, Geraldene Lowe-Ismail walked the streets of Singapore, taking tourists and Singaporeans on heritage tours packed with lively, detailed information about the island's buildings, roads, neighbourhoods, culture and people. Geraldene was the first to conduct walking tours in Singapore, and her knowledge of the island and its history is so encyclopaedic that, shortly after Singapore became independent in 1965, she was asked to help train tour guides and to be part of the team that shaped a 50-week training programme for tour guides. The programme is still being used today. Geraldene's career in the travel industry began in 1956 when, after completing a secretarial course, she first worked for Air India and then joined trading giant Anglo-French in 1957 when it started a travel agency. Some years later, she was asked by air conditioning company Carrier to set up a travel agency. When she married in 1967, she became a freelance tour guide. Wanting visitors to experience the real Singapore, she created and conducted walking tours that took people through the ethnic neighbourhoods, highlighting the unique architecture and traditional festivals. Geraldene wrote the 1988 book *Chinatown Memories* and is planning one about Orchard Road. In 2014 she received the Lifetime Achievement award for outstanding contribution to tourism at the Singapore Experience Awards.

The Singapore Women's Hall of Fame Honourees of 2018

YANG CHANG MAN

Protector of the Raffles Collection

Born: 1944

If not for Yang Chang Man, the priceless and irreplaceable Raffles Collection could have been lost to the world. It is the largest and most comprehensive collection of Southeast Asian wildlife. Many specimens were collected long ago from places in the region where the natural habitat has disappeared, and some wildlife species have become extinct. Housed for years at Singapore's National Museum, the collection was moved in 1972 to the then University of Singapore when it was decided the museum would concentrate on art and anthropology. For the next 16 years, some 126,000 animal specimens were shuttled in wooden crates to various places. During this time, the collection was looked after by zoologist and curator Yang Chang Man and her small team. It was a difficult task as the premises were run-down, with poor ventilation. Chang Man and her staff worked hard to ensure the collection was not damaged beyond repair. In 2015, the collection moved into the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at Kent Ridge. The museum aims to be a leader in Southeast Asian biodiversity research, education and outreach. That it has at its core the irreplaceable items of the Raffles Collection is largely because of Chang Man. An expert on aquatic bugs who has discovered more than 30 new species in the region, she is now an honorary research associate at the museum.

ANASTASIA TJENDRI-LIEW

Founder of one of Singapore's most successful bakery chains

Born: 1947

Growing up in Palembang, Indonesia, Anastasia Tjendri-Liew's dream was to be a pharmacist. Little did she know that she would, instead, found one of Singapore's most successful bakery chains. The third of eight children of a provision shop owner and his homemaker wife, Anastasia learnt to cook from her mother. After secondary school, she did a six-month baking and cooking course and then ran small cooking classes at the family home. In 1970, Anastasia came to Singapore where she met and married Johnson Liew, whose family had moved to Singapore from Indonesia when he was five. Anastasia settled into domestic life in their Marine Parade flat. But the oven beckoned, and in 1975 she started to make cakes and *kueh lapis*, selling them to friends. Demand grew, and she began to supply her products to shops and supermarkets. Then, in 1979, health inspectors told her she could not continue her business from her home kitchen. She immediately stopped baking. But customers kept asking for her cakes and *kueh*, so she opened a shop in Marine Terrace and named it Bengawan Solo. She now has more than 40 outlets. In 1998, Anastasia was the first recipient of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises' Woman Entrepreneur of the Year Award. She was awarded the Public Service Medal in 2008.

The Singapore Women's Hall of Fame Honourees of 2018

MIRANDA YAP

Pioneer of biomedical sciences in Singapore

Born: 1948 Died: 2015

Miranda Yap played a pivotal role in the development of biomedical sciences in Singapore. As the founding executive director of the Bioprocessing Technology Institute (BTI) and the executive director of the A*STAR Graduate Academy, she guided the development of specialised scientific institutions, some of which have been very successfully commercialised, and laid the foundations for Singapore's thriving biologics industry. She cultivated a vibrant research environment and concentrated on building a highly skilled research and development (R&D) talent pool. This led to important collaborations and partnerships with industry and helped Singapore to attract major biologics manufacturers from around the world to set up plants here. Biologics manufacturing is now a key sector of the Singapore economy. In 2006, Miranda was named a Foreign Associate of the United States National Academy of Engineering. Her election citation noted 'her outstanding achievements in education, research and management in the field of mammalian cell culture'. She was the first foreign female associate and the only engineer in Singapore to be elected to the Academy. In 2009, Miranda was the first person to be awarded the President's Science and Technology Medal, Singapore's highest science and technology honour. Tragically, Miranda suffered an aneurysm in 2011 while playing golf. For four years she was in a coma. Her husband, Yap Kian Tiong, cared for her until she died in October 2015.

CLAIRE CHIANG

Champion of Corporate Social Responsibility

Born 1951

When Claire Chiang left academia in 1994 to set up, together with her husband Ho Kwon Ping, the Banyan Tree hospitality group, the aim was not just to build a successful business but to do so with care for the environment and for local communities. The group's retail arm, Banyan Tree Gallery, practices what Claire calls 'community capitalism' – it works with village cooperatives and not-for-profit marketing agents to create employment for artisans in the areas around the group's resorts and hotels, and to help conserve local culture and heritage. Among other roles in the group, Claire heads Banyan Tree Global Foundation, the group's corporate social responsibility unit. Banyan Tree has over the years won an impressive list of social and environmental awards for its CSR efforts. Claire has, in the last three decades, also been very active in social and community work. She served as a Nominated Member of Parliament for two terms (1997-2001), raising for debate many policy issues related to the social service sector, women, family, education and the disadvantaged. Claire is a pioneering member of the Diversity Action Committee, which was established in 2014 to increase female representation on company boards. In 2011 Claire was awarded the Public Service Medal, and in 2014 the Public Service Star for her contribution to implementing work-life integration in Singapore.