

**OPENING MINDS
SHAPING LIVES**

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THE JOURNEY OF SINGAPORE'S FIRST POLYTECHNIC



SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC



THANK YOU

Published by Singapore Polytechnic

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It seems necessary in a book of this nature to pay tribute to everyone who has contributed to the success of Singapore Polytechnic. We attempted to do so. But found it impossible in view of the large number of individuals and organisations to whom we owe our achievements in the last 50 years.

We nevertheless like to say thank you to the 125,000 diligent alumni who made us proud as they excel in their work and in their lives. And to those who have so very kindly given their time, effort and sponsorships to help both the students and the institution grow since 1954.

We look forward to your continued support as we journey from good to great in the years ahead.

“ SP has had an illustrious half a century. I congratulate SP and its staff and alumni, past and present, for your many achievements and successes. I thank you for the difference you have made to the lives of numerous cohorts of students, and your continuing contributions to Singapore.

I am sure that SP, as the polytechnic with the longest history, will continue to upgrade and adapt itself, to meet new demands and stay abreast with newer institutions. I congratulate SP for 50 years of outstanding achievements, and wish you many more years of achievement and excellence.”

*Mr Lee Hsien Loong
Prime Minister and Minister for Finance
at Singapore Polytechnic's 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner
2 October 2004*

Special moment during the 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner: (from left) Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Education Dr Ng Eng Hen, Deputy Chairman of Singapore Polytechnic's Board of Governors Mr Leong Charn Huen, Chairman of Singapore Polytechnic's Board of Governors Mr Tan Kay Yong, Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong, Principal Mr Low Wong Fook and Permanent Secretary (Education) LG (NS) Lim Chuan Poh.





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ENOUGH SAID

A father with eight growing children told his first-born in 1963, “Son, go to the Polytechnic. With skills learnt from the Polytechnic, you will have opportunity to make good one day.”

Heeding his father’s advice, the son applied to study mechanical engineering part-time at Singapore’s first polytechnic while earning a living to help feed his siblings – all thanks to the institution’s day-release programme.

For five long years, the son and his approximately 3,000 Polytechnic mates toiled at work in the day and attended classes at Prince Edward Road campus at night, spending one day of the work week picking up practical skills at the workshops.

Balancing work and study was tough for many. Those who made it, graduated with sheer grit and determination. Their diplomas a ticket to better-paying jobs in fast-industrialising Singapore.

Fast forward 30 years and that same young man advised his own school-leaving son, “I went to Singapore Polytechnic as it offered a practical experience and got somewhere. You figure it out.” The youngster, who preferred to take his toys apart than sprout Shakespeare’s sonnets, enrolled in his father’s alma mater and went on to earn his degree overseas with his Polytechnic diploma in Electronic Engineering.

From fathers to daughters, mothers to sons, grandfathers to grandchildren. This account is by no means uncommon. It is one that is repeated in many households in Singapore over the generations. However, this story is especially poignant because the men featured are my grandfather and my father. Like many of his peers, the former had seen World War II and how a nation slowly picked up the pieces, attained self-government and independence, and embarked on an industrialisation programme to provide employment and develop an economy in its infancy.



Distinct landmark in campus: the Administration Building.

A person is seen from a low angle, climbing a rope structure against a clear blue sky. The person is wearing a blue shirt and dark pants, and is reaching up towards a horizontal wooden beam. Several other ropes and beams are visible, suggesting a complex climbing or team-building exercise. The perspective is looking up, emphasizing the height and challenge of the activity.

For him, the establishment of Singapore Polytechnic was timely and a symbol of hope for the future. My father, together with thousands of others, enrolled at Singapore Polytechnic for want of a better option after their Senior Cambridge School Certificate examinations, yesteryear's equivalent of the 'O' levels. What my father and his peers experienced was tremendous. Many of them came from big families and had to help out with the family income, working long hours.

Dad's most searing memory of those times was the long hard climb up the five stories to a classroom at Prince Edward Road campus. Each step he and his Polytechnic mates took groaned of weariness from a day's work and of knowing that the night ahead was long. Funnily enough, that climb was symbolic because it made them sterner stuff. Despite their heavy burden of family and work commitments, their common goal of graduating with a diploma made some of them today successful engineers turned entrepreneurs with listed companies boasting annual turnovers in the millions.

When it came down to me and my peers, we had numerous choices – junior colleges, polytechnics, private institutions and an early opportunity to venture overseas. Yet, the one overriding piece of advice and proof that we could not shut out and turn a blind eye to was how everyone in the know guaranteed that

Singapore Polytechnic was THE place to be – for THE courses, THE lecturers, THE facilities and THE social activities. Having seen my sister struggle miserably through junior college and my father's own testimony of his Singapore Polytechnic experience, the option was clear when it was my turn to decide on my course of study.



A crowd pleaser, *wushu* performances are a regular sight at campus events.

My own Singapore Polytechnic experience was nothing short of wonderful. In the numerous projects I have had to work on with my classmates, I learnt that working at such close quarters showed how it took different personalities in a team to bring out the best. Of course, the friends I made, the lecturers and tutors who nagged and guided us, have all been indelibly imprinted in my mind too. But most important of all, it was the way I have been taught to learn and what I have learnt in my course at the Polytechnic that have become second nature to me.



So, just as my grandfather had advised my father and he to me so many years ago, I will have the same piece of advice for my own children who would be seeking a path into our rapidly globalising world, “Go to Singapore Polytechnic.” Enough said.

Erwin Lim Jian Ming
Class of 1995
School of Electrical & Electronic Engineering

Rafts made of recycled materials competing at the Singapore River Raft Race which aims to raise environmental-consciousness among participants and at the same time raise funds for charities.

MAKING HISTORY DEFINING THE FUTURE

People are Singapore's most valuable resource and Singapore Polytechnic has played a significant role in preparing her workforce from the early days of the country's independence.

Looking back, one would marvel at the Polytechnic's early advocates who had the foresight to underscore the importance of technical education in the country's progress. Most impressive of all is the fact that it has stayed relevant to the purpose and development of Singapore through its generations of staff and students in spite of the many unique challenges.

In many ways, Singapore Polytechnic's development parallels that of Singapore's. Thus its name, practical and functional at the time of inception, has been most appropriately selected for the icon of technical training in this part of the world.

Over the years, it has transformed from being a pacesetter to a trendsetter and from making history to defining the future.

Proudly and confidently, Singapore Polytechnic celebrated its 50th Anniversary with the vigour and exuberance of a proven and successful institution. As Singapore's first polytechnic, it has an intriguing history filled with successes and achievements as well as anxieties and crises but never a dull moment.

Singapore Polytechnic's story began as a need to train and produce skilled technicians for Singapore's industrialisation effort.

From the legendary roof garden meeting in 1951 to the formative year of 1954, a group of business leaders, legislators and scholars discussed, studied and reported on the necessity for a full-fledged training institute to serve the present and future manpower needs of the country. Their recommendations were approved and the government appointed a board of governors to oversee the creation of Singapore Polytechnic.

In the 1960s through to the 1970s, the social, political and economic landscapes of Singapore changed dramatically. During this period of social upheavals and political tensions, Singapore remained steadfast in her endeavour to industrialise.

In 1961, the Economic Development Board was established and Jurong Industrial Estate became operational. And when Singapore was proclaimed an independent nation in 1965, her survival depended solely on her human resource and geographical location.

What followed was an intense effort to draw foreign investors into Singapore with attractive business incentives, good infrastructure and improved labour situation. Working closely with the government and the industries, Singapore Polytechnic began producing well-trained and skilled technicians to meet the demands of the growing number of multinational corporations that have set up their bases here.



School of Chemical and Life Sciences boasts of state-of-the-art equipment for processing plastics.



Sophisticated training equipment to prepare School of Design and the Environment students for the industry.

But it was not all smooth sailing for Singapore Polytechnic in the first two decades of its existence. The Polytechnic was experiencing transitional development with the introduction and subsequent transfer of courses to other institutions, with high staff turnover and classes held in three dispersed campuses. Students did not readily accept these changes. They made their displeasure known openly. That era was probably best remembered for student protests and sit-ins. In many ways, the Polytechnic was going through a phase of self-discovery. As was Singapore and the rest of the world.

When the American astronaut took his first step on the moon in 1969, thousands of Singaporeans were glued to the images on black-and-white television sets. In the same year, 400,000 people gathered over three days at one of history's most famous rock festival in a farm in USA. Woodstock, as it was fondly referred to, created a wave of "hippie" culture across the world. Young men and women embraced the notion of peace and vowed collectively to "make love not war" in the wake of the conflict in Vietnam.

In Singapore Polytechnic, the local bohemians could be easily identified in their long hair, bell-bottoms, tie-dyed shirts and casual open-mindedness – symbolic of the era of newfound freedom. They were often seen out late in *sarabat* stalls (makeshift beverage cart) behind the bus depot next to Prince Edward Road campus. This caused much alarm among parents who eyed Polytechnic students suspiciously and criticised the "degrading" image of the technical institution.

An over-generalised impression no doubt. For the real situation then was that the Polytechnic was facing increased popularity with rapidly rising enrolments in both full and part-time courses. Prince Edward Road campus was completely used from morning to night to accommodate all classes. The space problem was becoming critical. It was therefore timely when plans for a new campus in Dover Road were announced.

Besides accommodating more students and facilitating more courses, the new campus provided an environment more conducive for learning. Built and equipped at a cost of over S\$40 million with S\$4.8 million in aid from the United Nations, the Singapore Polytechnic Dover Road campus was well positioned to produce 50 percent of the 13,000 technicians the Government had targeted.

In alignment with the country's economic re-structuring plans, the Polytechnic laid out a five-year expansion initiative and introduced industrial attachments. With improved facilities, Singapore Polytechnic was able to move faster to meet changes and be more proactive to take on new challenges.

In 1981, one of the world's best airports opened at Changi. Personal computers made their debut. The advent of the microprocessor led to the popularisation of portable sound systems and video games. The 1980s saw the post-war baby boomers coming of age and the term "yuppie" was coined to refer affectionately to the educated and affluent professionals. Singapore was heralded as one of the East Asian Tigers and a model of export-driven economic success.



Demonstration on how the ultrasound machine in the Biomedical Engineering Laboratory of the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering works.



One of the design studios equipped with high-end Macintosh workstations in the School of Info-Communications Technology.

Singapore Polytechnic graduates were able to land jobs soon after graduation as demands for skilled manpower escalated. In its 30th year, Singapore Polytechnic saw a record number of graduates – an endorsement of career-minded people who believed in the institution and its qualifications to secure future employment. But the institution did not rest on its laurels. It continued to look for ways to improve its curriculum and prepare its students for an ever-evolving and challenging world ahead.

With the collapse of communism, the opening of China, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet Union, it was apparent that the new markets would pose stiff competition in the form of cheap labour and lower production costs. Globalisation became a buzzword. Foreign languages and exchange programmes were introduced at the Polytechnic to ensure that its students remained relevant and in touch with the new business environment.

As the world entered the 21st century, Singapore Polytechnic embarked on a bold re-branding initiative to take on the challenges of a borderless, global economy.

At its 50th Anniversary, and after having more than 120,000 graduates passed through its doors, it launched a new broad-based and multi-disciplinary educational model incorporated within a flexible learning system.

The aim: to take the institution on a journey from good to great – making history and defining, yet again, the future of polytechnic education as Singapore's first polytechnic.

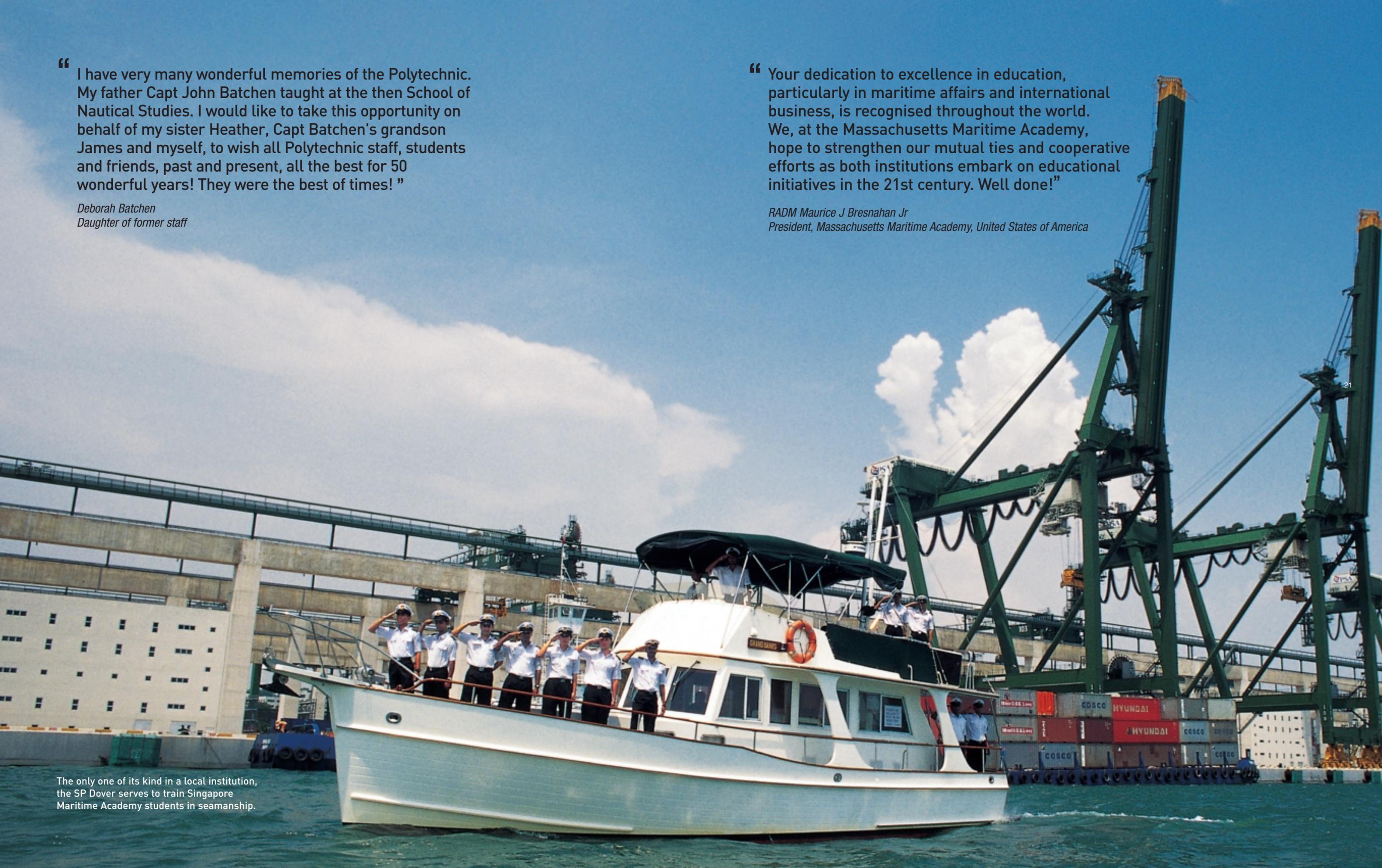
“ I have very many wonderful memories of the Polytechnic. My father Capt John Batchen taught at the then School of Nautical Studies. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of my sister Heather, Capt Batchen's grandson James and myself, to wish all Polytechnic staff, students and friends, past and present, all the best for 50 wonderful years! They were the best of times! ”

*Deborah Batchen
Daughter of former staff*

“ Your dedication to excellence in education, particularly in maritime affairs and international business, is recognised throughout the world. We, at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, hope to strengthen our mutual ties and cooperative efforts as both institutions embark on educational initiatives in the 21st century. Well done!”

*RADM Maurice J Bresnahan Jr
President, Massachusetts Maritime Academy, United States of America*

The only one of its kind in a local institution, the SP Dover serves to train Singapore Maritime Academy students in seamanship.





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“ In the past 50 years, Singapore Polytechnic has achieved much in teaching and research work, which contributed to the development of Singapore's educational and scientific sectors. Our two institutions also enjoyed very good cooperative relationship. On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Singapore Polytechnic, we sincerely wish your institution a prosperous future.”

*Prof Xu Fuming
President, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, China*

“ Singapore Polytechnic has come far in its 50 years. It is now a world-class polytechnic. Among its 125,000 strong alumni are many graduates who have become market leaders in their chosen fields. I am sure many of you would know of people like Professor Shih Choon Fong, President of National University of Singapore, Bill Chang York Chye, Regional Managing Director South Asia of Cisco Systems, Ms Chong Phit Lian, President & CEO of Singapore Mint, and Edmund Tie, Executive Chairman & CEO of DTZ Debenham Tie Leung.”

*Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam
Minister for Education
at Singapore Polytechnic's 44th Graduation Ceremony
17 August 2004*

Excellent service and facilities at the Library contribute to a conducive learning environment.



“ We wish you every success and prosperity for the future. We look forward to deepening our strong partnership as we progress together hand-in-hand. I appreciate very much the opportunity to have been a part of your celebration in October 2004. It gave me a great chance to appreciate Singapore Polytechnic’s past and envision its future contributions to the people of Singapore.”

*Toshio Izumiya
Chairman, Kanazawa Institute of Technology, Japan*

Tree planting by Mr Toshio Izumiya (second from right), Chairman of Japan’s Kanazawa Institute of Technology, to commemorate his visit to the campus. With him: (from left) Deputy Principal (Administration) Mr Edward Quah, Principal Mr Low Wong Fook, Mrs Izumiya and Deputy Principal (Academic) Mr Yeow Kian Peng.