



(From left) Loke Lup Peng, Rakesh Kumar Gupta, Pearleen Chan, Winne Soh and Robert Chew are all winners in their own right for their efforts in developing the IT industry in Singapore.

PHOTO: SINGAPORE COMPUTER SOCIETY

At the top of their game

Five IT experts were honoured for their contributions to the infocomm industry in Singapore

HE WAS an accounting student at the National University of Singapore in 1980.

However, instead of writing an accounting program for his second-year school project, Robert Chew decided to write a program that could solve end-to-end problems – from optimising the number of beds in a hospital to keeping the costs of running a school low, using what is known as simplex algorithm.

Simply put, it is a program that could, say, calculate the best way airline catering companies

could keep costs down while still meeting the myriad constraints of providing different types of cuisine to hordes of travellers.

After that brush with computer science, Robert, 51, was hooked and went on to earn a master's degree in computer science.

These days, the chairman of the IT Standards Committee, which promotes the development of technology standards here, has taken it upon himself to champion programming in Singapore.

"I believe IT is an area that Singapore can do well in because it's about people and that's really the only resource we truly have," he said.

He was instrumental in starting the annual codeXtreme Apps 24-hour programming competition in 2007 to nurture interest in programming among youths here.

For his efforts, he was named IT Leader of the Year at last Friday's IT Leader Awards.

Now in its 13th year, the annual awards ceremony organised by the Singapore Computer Society (SCS) recognises those who have contributed to the development of the infocomm industry in Singapore.

Aside from Robert, four others from the IT fraternity here were also honoured.

There was Pearleen Chan, 62, this year's Hall of Fame winner. The consultant, who is now working for Accenture, was recognised for her role in developing IT nationally.

She was part of the team from the National Computer Board that kick-started the Civil Service Computerisation Program in 1988. That is the early iteration of what is widely known today as e-government services.

Rakesh Kumar Gupta, 31, who founded education software company Heulab, was Young Professional of the Year. His company is credited with developing innovative software used in more than 400 schools around the world.

The two IT Youth winners, Loke Lup Peng, 20, and Winne Soh, 24, were chosen for their efforts in spreading IT awareness among their peers.

As a student at Temasek Polytechnic, Lup Peng organised seminars to help fellow students upgrade their IT skills. Winne, who co-founded Dream Axis, a company that creates virtual world content, has also organised a nationwide competition to promote IT awareness among secondary school students.

At the awards ceremony, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Lee Boon Yang said the Government will commit \$125 million to tide the IT industry over the difficult times ahead.

The industry now contributes about 6 per cent to Singapore's national GDP and hires about 139,000 people here.

The bulk of the sum will go towards initiatives geared towards training IT professionals and nurturing talent for the industry.

The Critical Infocomm Technology Resource Programme will get \$25 million more in funding, which will bump up subsidies on infocomm course fees from 50 to 80 per cent.

The Government is also allocating an additional \$30 million to the National Infocomm Scholarship programme and the new Integrated Infocomm Scholarship programme targeted at outstanding O level students who want to pursue infocomm-related diploma and degree courses from polytechnic through university.

President of SCS Wilson Tan said in his speech: "Coupled with the economic slowdown and the increased possibility of job losses, it becomes even more critical that we assist in upgrading...and retooling of our ICT workforce."

By Tham Yuen-C

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