

## **Young Unionists Fly NTUC Flag High**

*This year, the National Day Parade returns to its birthplace – the Padang. And the privilege of representing NTUC at the 40th NDP has been passed to members of Young NTUC, who banded together to continue the proud union tradition.*

*Clement Choo catches up with some of the young participants to get their views on being a part of the nation's 40th anniversary celebrations.*

NTUC News 5 Aug 2005

MR FAUZI Alkaff enjoyed his first National Day Parade (NDP) experience last year so much that he immediately joined the 2005 NTUC contingent when the union asked for younger members to participate.

Come Aug 9, the 41-year-old United Workers of Electronics and Electrical Industries member will march with his Young NTUC comrades at the Padang, continuing a tradition of representing NTUC at the NDP.

"I feel really proud to represent NTUC and workers to celebrate our nation's 40th year of independence," he said.

His sentiments are shared by Singapore Teachers' Union Deputy General Secretary and Young NTUC Chairperson Edwin Lye, who noted that NTUC has taken part in every NDP, making the annual event a key activity that the labour movement prides itself in.

With the formation of Young NTUC earlier this year, it was suggested that its chairperson should head the contingent for the 40th NDP. Mr Lye gamely took up the challenge, saying that a number of his fellow young comrades joined to support the NTUC contingent – most of them participating for the first time.

The 113-strong contingent has trained every weekend at several locations, such as Costa Sands Resort, Downtown East, Nee Soon Camp and the Padang since March 30 – under the supervision of contingent coordinator Abdullah Talib, who has been putting NTUC contingents through their paces for the past 13 years.

Apart from the challenge of getting the members to work as a team, Mr Talib said the gruelling training periods had some lighter moments, like when a participant came dressed in different colours from the others.

Mr Lye still remembers the highly spirited initial training session, when 167 members showed up to vie for a place in the contingent. Although Young NTUC is leading the contingent, there are older participants at 62 years to some as young as 19 in the squad.

National Transport Workers' Union member Peter Kwek, 33, said: "When I saw the elder contingent members who volunteered for this national event and sacrificing every weekend to perfect all the moves, I was really motivated to join the contingent."

Holding up Mr Alkaff as an example, Mr Kwek added that he was inspired by their ability to withstand the heat of the sun during training, standing at attention for an hour at each rehearsal without fainting.

Ms Tiffany Heng, 30, had joined the squad out of curiosity, and it turned out to be an eye-opener for her. The Amalgamated Union of Public Employees member had only watched past NDPs on television, so being a participant gave her an insight into the workings behind the nation's annual birthday party.

"What stirred my emotions were the smiles and cheers of the children during the National Education Shows – that to me is inspiring," she said enthusiastically.

After going through the many training sessions, Ms Heng said the strangers who got together for the first time had formed strong bonds with each other.

For Mr Tan Seng Kiong, it was a good opportunity to meet new comrades and build ties with members from other unions. The 30-year-old teacher and STU member enjoyed his new encounters – a welcomed breather from the long hours spent in school.

Besides acknowledging the efforts and sacrifices put in by the participants, credit must also be given to unsung heroes working quietly behind the scenes, said Mr Lye, referring to Mr Talib and staff from NTUC Club.

"At the end of the day, one thing we learn is that it is all a team effort. Whether you are in the contingent marching, or whether you're supporting in terms of logistics, all these are the hidden heroes who make sure everything goes well," he added.

### **Voices from the heart**

As Singapore celebrates its fourth decade of independence, NTUC News asked some Young NTUC members: "Ten years in the future, what will you tell your children or other people when they ask you what was it like to be part of the 40th NDP?" Here are their responses:

**"It was difficult but I made it through. The feeling of the crowd when we marched into the parade gave me goose bumps and made me forget all my body aches. We need to appreciate all those involved not only in this parade but those before and after the 40th NDP."**

- United Workers of Electronics and Electrical Industries member Fauzi Abdullah

**"It's an amazing experience. Imagine so many different people from all walks of life coming together as one contingent to celebrate and march for the nation. There's a sense of pride and satisfaction after all those months of training under the sun, wind and rain."**

- Amalgamated Union of Public Employees member Tiffany Heng

**"It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I'm proud to have participated in this year's marching contingent, and would certainly encourage them to participate in NDP."**

- National Transport Workers' Union member Peter Kwek

**"Yes, I was there! Yes, it was hard work! Yes, we had to sacrifice ("burn") many weekends! And yes, it was worthwhile and I am proud to have taken part in the NDP! You should go and take part in NDP too!"**

- NTUC Contingent Commander Edwin Lye

\*\*\*\*\*