



STILL JOYOUS: Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam (centre) interacting with the residents who turned up for the sports festival despite the downpour.

Soggy but spirited end

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THE threatening skies were not ideal for a sports carnival, but busloads of residents from the South West district gamely turned up at West Coast Park yesterday morning, hoping to send off their inaugural Community Sports Festival with a bang.

Unfortunately, the weather remained uncooperative. So, instead of a morning spent playing telematches and football in the Children's League, most spent their time seeking shelter from the rain.

Even though the games had to be called off in the end, Finance Minister and Member of Parliament for Jurong GRC Tharman Shanmugaratnam was impressed by the turnout.

"It's really quite amazing, it started raining quite early at five, and yet you've got busloads of people coming in, and

lots of people on their own," said Mr Tharman, who was guest-of-honour at the event yesterday.

The month-long sports festival saw about 10,000 of South West district's 733,000 residents take part in activities like mass cycling, bowling and dragon boating over the past few weekends.

"In each constituency, there's a regularity to it now, people look forward to it," said Mr Tharman, adding that about 50 sporting activities were held each month in the various constituencies.

"The activities bring people together who weren't natural sportsmen but they're people who like to stay active and fit and keep up the bond with each other," he said.

"It's really a wonderful way of integrating people in a way that is enjoyable and keeps them fit."

ART WITH HEART

Singapore Arts Street makes its heartland debut in Hougang

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WHEN it comes to appreciating art, wealth or talent is not a criteria for admission. Art is for all, said the organisers of Singapore Arts Street.

And so, yesterday, those at Hougang Central Hub were treated to a kaleidoscope of handicraft and artwork from local artists – both established and budding – as well as songs and dances from school children. For those who wanted more of a hands-on experience, they could sign up for art workshops or pick up a can of spray paint and leave their mark on the graffiti wall.

The Singapore Arts Street 2008 @ North East, jointly organised by the North East Community Development Council and Singapore Arts Street, made its heartland debut yesterday with over 300 artists and art enthusiasts showcasing and selling their work and performances.

The annual event, now in its third year, had been held at Tanglin Shopping Centre for the past two years and is making its way into the suburbs for the first time.

Minister of State for Finance and Transport Lim Hwee Hua, the guest-of-honour yesterday, said the purpose of bringing Singapore Arts Street to the heartlands was "two-fold". It would expose residents to various forms of art without them having to go to the city, and also provide a "very good platform" for local artists to show their talents to more people, the MP for Aljunied GRC said.

Founder of Singapore Arts Street Juan Wong, who had been inspired by Australia's art markets, said it attracted mainly tourists and expatriates previously.

"We want to change the perception that art is high-end. It can be very casual," she said. "This year, we want to promote the art to locals." The event also tries to help people in difficult situations, Ms Wong added.

Singapore Arts Street invites participants from prisons, charities and non-profit organisations to sell or display their art or handmade items. For instance, the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Federation (DHHFS) as well as Mouth and Foot Painting Artists (MFPA) had stalls.

A member of MFPA, Mr Tan Kok Leong, 48, who demonstrated how he does Chinese ink paintings, said the opportunity to display his works and meet other artists was a "valuable experience", while DHHFS



BATTLING ON: A colon cancer patient will use the proceeds to pay for treatment.

ART FOR LIFE

Life used to be just about daily survival for ex-inmate Frankie Chang, but these days, he has a greater mission.

He wants to inspire today's youths to lead successful lives, and he wants to reach out to other ex-prisoners. And above all these, Mr Chang, 58, has to battle colon cancer.

At the Singapore Arts Street yesterday, the self-taught artist's drawings were on display.

Mr Chang taught himself to draw using a special technique while in prison. He would strip the wood from a pencil and grind the lead together with charcoal using the handle of a paintbrush. Once the mix is prepared, Mr Chang would use a cloth to spread the mix over paper. So far, he has completed over 150 drawings.

He told Today in Mandarin that he draws inspiration from landscapes, and portraits of successful people he sees in newspapers. Newspaper images are easily forgotten, he said, so he hopes to preserve their success stories with his drawings.

"I hope young people can appreciate what they have and learn from these people," he said,

comparing his life of hardship to today's youth.

At five, Mr Chang was sent to an orphanage and his life of petty crime and illegal activities began – until he was detained in prison in 1999 for eight years for drug-related activities.

Two weeks after he was released, he found he had stage three colon cancer during a medical check-up.

"I was upset, but I accept it. I am used to hardship," he stated matter-of-factly.

Currently undergoing chemotherapy, he spends his day resting in his one-room flat. He is too tired to draw now, he said.

His artwork is being sold at the Singapore Arts Street, and will be used to pay his medical bills. The Northeast Community Development Council is also auctioning some of his pieces to its corporate partners and council members to help raise funds for him.

Moving forward, Mr Chang said he hopes to find a sponsor who will help him set up an art school to reach out to other ex-inmates. Those interested in purchasing his artwork can contact Mr Justin Ng from Forth Gallery at 93677283.

2008 was held over the last weekend, but you can catch it again next Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 6pm at Hougang Central Hub. More information can be found at www.singaporeartsstreet.com.

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