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Five to inspire

Anthea De Lima

IT'S a celebration of womanhood and the five women chosen for Neutrogena's inaugural Neu Woman Achievers Award are indeed worthy of this honour.

The women - air force pilot Kapt Zalina Sungip, National Art Gallery curator Zanita Anuar, obstetrician and gynaecologist Dr Tang Boon Nee, TV presenter/brand manager Joanne de Rozario and former national rhythmic gymnast Carolyn Au-Yong - were chosen not just for their successes but also because they are adept at balancing multi roles.

"The award is a recognition of excellence and reflects their accomplishments as outstanding Malaysian women," said Johnson & Johnson Malaysia managing director Jun Alli at the awards presentation ceremony-cum-charity gala dinner in aid of the Malaysian AIDS Council recently.

"They are indeed in a class of their own and we believe they will be an inspiration to others," he added.

The inaugural Neu Woman Achievers Award was initiated by Neutrogena (a member of the Johnson & Johnson group of companies) to honour and celebrate women who excel in their chosen fields, inspire others, make a difference to the community and are, or by example, encouraging other women to do likewise.

The five women will be involved in the charity of choice - this year, it is the Malaysian AIDS Council.

"It is part of Neutrogena's vision to use the award presentation as a vehicle to highlight and champion social concerns and encourage women to be more actively involved in community service," Alli said, adding that a different cause will be selected each year.

This year's winners will attend a HIV/AIDS awareness programme specially organised by the Malaysian AIDS Council and be actively involved in projects and fund-raisers jointly organised by Johnson & Johnson Malaysia, the Malaysian AIDS Council and the Malaysian AIDS Foundation.

"We chose the Malaysian AIDS Council because we believe that there is still a lot that must be done to spread AIDS awareness in the country. As our first step, we intend to donate no less than RM50,000 from the proceeds of this dinner to the foundation," Alli said.

The evening's guest-of-honour, Malaysian AIDS Council president/Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, said in her speech that despite the trying times, one should never allow the fight against AIDS to be overshadowed. "In fact, a situation such as the current war tends to worsen the situation," she said.

The night's events mark the beginning of a new partnership between Johnson & Johnson and the Malaysian AIDS Council (whose fund-raising arm is the Malaysian AIDS Foundation).

Initially intended as a fund-raiser under the Neu Woman Achievers Award, the partnership has become a long-term relationship that will ensure the corporate giant's support for the HIV/AIDS cause in Malaysia.

At a Press conference at the end of the evening, the five women said they were honoured to be selected as this year's winners.

"It is an honour to have been chosen as a role model for others. There are so many women with vast accomplishments and it blows me away that I was selected," said de Rozario, who has carved a niche for herself in the male-dominated world of broadcast communications.

A familiar face on ntv7, de Rozario is undoubtedly more than just a pretty face. As brand manager for the TV station's magazine and programmes

belt, she is responsible for branding and the promotion of talk shows and magazine-type programmes for the station.

She is also involved in large-scale productions, such as the recent Asian X-Games V and continues to present programmes for ntv7 on an ad hoc basis.

Zanita, who has a first degree in anthropology and a master's in material culture studies, is proud of her work in looking after Malaysia's many treasures and artifacts.

She takes her role as a recipient of a Neu Woman Achievers Award seriously. "Any normal human would be proud of being seen as one of the 'best' but such an honour comes with its requisite responsibilities.

"I intend to fulfil them to the best of my ability and look forward to giving back to society in the form of community work," said Zanita, a senior curator responsible for planning and developing visual art programmes.

Dr Tang sees her role as more than just a doctor. She derives her greatest satisfaction from being able to empower women with knowledge and confidence.

"I am proud to have been acknowledged for this award but I believe that anyone can achieve success. I think it is important that you follow your heart and your instincts - the rest will follow," said Dr Tang, who is attached to a private medical centre.

A trail-blazer of sorts, Zalina was the only woman in her training unit when she first joined the air force and today still remains the only woman in her flight unit.

"I was surprised when I was told that I had been chosen for this award because I think most of us only have time for work, work and more work.

"My advice to women is to go for it - never see anything as an obstacle and once you have decided on a goal, work hard to achieve it," said Zalina, who is in charge of maritime surveillance.

Though the youngest achiever, Au-Yong's success is nothing to be sneezed at. A former rhythmic gymnast who represented Malaysia in the 1998 Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games, she was part of the team that won Malaysia's first gold medal at the games for the rhythmic gymnastics team event.

At the tender age of 21, the future holds a lot more for her. "My successes came at 16 and I feel honoured to be part of such an esteemed group.

"I hope that the best is yet to come," said Au-Yong, a recipient of the National Sports Council's Best Women's Team Award in 1999.

The five recipients were presented with an exclusive timepiece, a year's supply of Neutrogena products and a specially designed Neu Woman Achievers trophy.

* The writer can be contacted at anthea@nstp.com.my