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Bringing kampung spirit to condos

Yoga, karate, excursions - condos are going all out to boost community spirit

By Ng Mei Yan

MRS Gerlyn Lam loves to break out in a good sweat once in a while. But she doesn't hit the commercial gyms. The workout is literally at her doorstep.

Every Wednesday evening, the 40-year-old remisier goes to the function room at the Clearwater condominium where she lives, near Bedok Reservoir, for a session of beginner's yoga with 13 other residents. She will soon take up a rock'n'roll dance class at the condominium too.

Many other mid-size or large condominium estates these days organise exercise classes, fun events and excursions for residents.

The activities range from festive celebrations, to potluck parties and KTV sessions by the pool, plus overseas trips and lessons such as yoga, karate and even Afro-Aerobics Jive, a fitness programme using African dance steps and rhythms.

Residents get to know what's on offer through flyers, notices at lift landings, newsletters, word-of-mouth and e-mail.

Fees vary, usually depending on the number of participants who sign up. Generally, however, festive events organised by the management are subsidised, so residents pay about \$2 to \$6 each for a party in the function room. Costs of tours and classes are not subsidised by the management, but the bigger the group, the cheaper it becomes.

'When we organise such activities, there is a greater sense of community and they become an attraction for prospective tenants because of the vibrancy created,' said Mr Jordan Neo, managing director of Knight Frank Estate Management, which manages about 77 condominiums in Singapore.

'This is especially so for the older estates, which may lose out to newer ones in terms of freshness.'

Although not all activities are well-received at all condominiums, most

management councils say the response is warm, sometimes overwhelming.

When Clearwater rallied residents to join the New Paper Big Walk last year, the management expected only 40 people. But 80 signed up and they had to book a second bus, said Mr Jason Loh, 44, a member of the management council.

Mr Philip Heng, chairman of the management council at Aquarius by the Park in Bedok Reservoir View, said: 'The main focus is to promote a family-friendly community and bring residents closer to each other.'

Management councils give careful consideration to the type of activities offered.

Said Mr Samuel Ang, 41, chairman of the management councils in his neighbourhood and Bayshore condominium on the East Coast: 'We consider the value of the activity in terms of whether it can foster greater interaction between residents of the condo as well as within the constituency.'

He was referring to an upcoming intra-constituency tennis tournament organised by Bayshore. The title of the competition is called the Abdullah Challenge Cup, named after Mr Abdullah Tarmugi, an MP for East Coast GRC.

Residents are happy with their lively estates.

Madam Angie Chew, 41, an insurance agent and a member of Bayshore's tennis group, said: 'I used to hardly use the facilities, but after taking part in tennis, I mingle around more.

'Besides, I pay so much in conservancy fees. I may as well make use of the facilities and join in the games.' She pays \$793.80 every three months.

Said Clearwater's Mrs Lam: 'When we know the people, we can help each other out.'

Others enjoy re-creating the feel of the good old days. Said Mr Lee Yat Cheong, 46, a general manager living at the Teneriffe in Bukit Timah: 'It's a good time for families to gather, for adults to catch up with one another and for kids to play together.

'It's like we're back to the kampung days.'