



RESTROOM ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE)

26, ubi road 4 Singapore 408613

telefax:68412891

telephone:68411621

website: www.toilet.org.sg

www.worldtoilet.org

RESTROOM ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE) NEWSLETTER - February 2004

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What business got to do with toilets?

If you are in service industry, your aim is of course to please the customers. And, making customers happy is more than just air-conditioned walkways, shops, bargains, and all the buzz.

Today, successful shopping centres, restaurants and places of entertainment are all competing for attention. One key to success is to make your premises, a destination for your customers. That they “want” to visit you.

To be a place of destination you will have to provide not just what the customers want, i.e. food, entertainment, shops, but also ample car parks, accessibility, security and above all good public toilets.

That’s where the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS) comes into the picture. We will not only advise you on the design, but also guide you and your cleaners on how to maintain the toilets, and even grade your toilets.

Happy Toilets, Healthy People



RAS Happy Toilet Programme is a unique way of telling people that you have pristine, hygienic toilets to serve the needs of your customers. It shows how much you care for your customers that you even look into their personal needs.

The Happy Toilet Award programme awards public toilets with a three, four or five star rating for their standards and excellence. The very best public toilets, which meet all of the design, quality and maintenance criteria set out by the RAS, will receive a five-star rating. All public toilets with three stars and above will be allowed to carry the "Happy Toilet" logo.



The "Happy Toilet" Programme aims to raise the standard of public toilets throughout Singapore and promote those establishments that look after the needs of their customers. Participation is entirely voluntary and will be managed according to guidelines set out by the RAS and endorsed by the World Toilet Organisation.

Examples of Toilets that have received Happy Toilet recognition:

Upper Pierce Reservoir Park (4-Star Happy Toilet)



Kovan Hougang Market & Food Centre (5-Star Happy Toilet)



Tampines Mall (5-Star Happy Toilet)



ST Eating House (4-Star Happy Toilet)



Singapore Zoological Gardens (5-Star Happy Toilet)



More customers

Since its launch, numerous toilets have already signed up for the programme and allowed their facilities to be assessed for grading. Several organisations have reportedly noticed a pick up in their businesses.

“After my toilet has been rated as a Happy Toilet, the number of customers increased. More office ladies are willing to dine in my coffee shop and many have commented that our toilets are clean and nice,” said Ms Wendy Ong, owner of Chef’s Choice Coffeeshop.

Indeed cleaner toilets do attract a larger crowd, so much so that customers actually give feedback to the management on the state of their toilets.



Ms Julie Ong, Senior Manager of Tampines Mall said: “There has been more publicity after the ratings of the toilets. Customers appreciate that the toilets are well done-up and catered to their needs. The rest of the toilets in the mall will be upgraded to the same standards.”

And it is not only shopping malls and coffeeshops that are getting in on the Happy Toilet Culture, even hawker centres are getting in on the act, as Mr Larry Neo of



Kovan Hougang Market & Food Centre adds:

“Not every market can attain a five-star rating on their toilets. Customers also didn’t expect a hawker centre’s toilet to be so clean. This is a very good effort on the part of the Hawker Association of Singapore and Aljunied Town Council.”

Other similar eating outlets have also this to say about the Happy Toilet Award programme, “there have been more patrons after the rating and they praised the clean toilets,” beamed a Ms Serene Tan of ST Eating House.

Hotels, Shopping Centres, Coffee Shops, Parks (and our cleaning attendants)



However, it was not just the service sectors that took part in the programme, even our National Parks took the lead and showed others that their toilets too could attain a similar standard.

“The National Parks Board is happy to receive the awards for the toilets in Singapore Botanic Gardens, Katong Park, Bukit Batok Nature Park and the Upper Peirce Reservoir Park. Maintaining Cleanliness in our facilities is part of our effort to provide a pleasant experience for park users,” said Ms Lorena Chew, Communications Manager, National Parks Board.



“Toilets are quite clean and in good condition, it’s only when the pupils use them does it get dirtied. If it gets dirty, attendants will immediately clean up after the pupils to ensure the toilet remains clean.”

And the attendants did get recognition – Susanti who takes care of the Kovan Hougang Market & Food Centre became the first recipient of the Best Cleaner (Public Toilet) award. It was presented to her at last year’s Clean and Green Week celebrations by DPM Lee Hsien Loong. Congratulations!

Toilets are indeed big business these days, with our standards of living continuously increasing, it's important that our toilets too maintain the same level of advancement as the rest of our society be it in the service sectors, or even in our own homes.

News Bites

Toilet Upgrading Programme (TUP) extended for one year



The National Environment Agency's (NEA) Toilet Upgrading Programme (TUP) has been extended for another year after its December 31st 2003 deadline. The scheme pays a coffee shop owner half the cost, up to \$5000, to improve the toilets.

Many coffee shops didn't upgrade during the recession. According to NEA nearly half of the 800 coffee shops in Housing Board estates have already signed as their owners believe that better toilets do indeed mean better business.

4-Star Happy Toilet awarded to Market & Food Centre – before it is built!



On 13 Feb 2004, RAS awarded a 4-star Happy Toilet to Aljunied Town Council (AJTC) for the Ground Breaking ceremony to rebuild the market and food centre at Blk 630, Bedok Reservoir Road. It is yet to be built and the award was based on the architecture drawings and the excellent track records of AJTC i.e. AJTC already has a 5-star Happy Toilet market & food centre at Blk 209, Hougang Ave 1 and

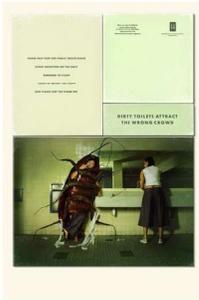
4-star Happy Toilet temporary market & food centre at Blk 113, Hougang Ave 1.

Kuala Lumpur launched their Clean Toilet Campaign



RAS was invited to attend the launch of Kuala Lumpur's "Toilet Cleanliness Campaign: Central Zone 2004" at Berjaya Times Square on 15 Feb 2004. Launching the event were Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting. The Government has allocated RM32mil to upgrade public toilets nationwide for two years, beginning from last year. The minister said that improving public toilets had to be a joint effort between the Government and the people – users and owners of premises who build and maintain public toilets.

“RAS tongue-in-cheek approach is a breath of fresh air”

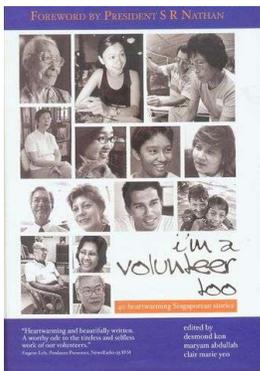


“Humor him: Have a laugh in the loo’ appeared in the New Paper on Sunday on 15 Feb 2004. As columnist Sylvia Toh said “SINGAPORE got hope! It’s cheerful news indeed to learn that a voluntary group of civic-conscious people have tackled – bottoms up – a dirty social habit and emerged flush with success.....The RAS is good, clean proof that, first, we don’t have to live in a fine city for the city to be fine” (Full article can be accessed at <http://newpaper.asia1.com.sg/top/story/0,4136,51684,00.html?>)

If you identify with this approach, join the RAS as a volunteer now!

We need many hands to help us convert documents for our website; translate English documents to Chinese; become chaperons in our school programmes; assess toilets for our Happy Toilet Programme etc.

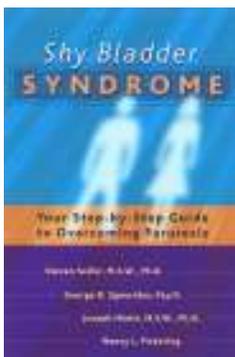
NVPC Book: I’m a Volunteer Too



Ever wondered what is it like to be a volunteer in Singapore? For those unsure about taking the first step, there’s a new book published by The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre called “I’m a Volunteer Too”. The 236 page book contains 40 remarkable stories from Singapore’s very own volunteers such as Elizabeth Choy, Christine Laimer, Oon Chiew Seng, Elim Chew, Gerard Ee, Dr Seet Ai Mee as well as how celebrities like Kit Chan and Eunice Olsen found true riches becoming volunteers. Readers can expect to be enthralled by their experiences as well as learn more about volunteerism.

The book retails for \$12 for paperback and \$22 for hardback and can be bought from Kinokuniya Bookstores, Times Bookstores or you can order it from the website, www.nvpc.org.sg

What to do if your bladder is shhhh....shy?



Ever had that feeling when you really need to visit the toilet but when you finally get there, you can’t do your business? Frustrated? Then you might be suffering from shybladder or bashful bladder.

Bashful Bladder Syndrome (BBS) scientifically known as *Paruresis* and people who experience BBS are known as *Paruretics*. BBS is a psychological disorder that involves the urinary system. More precisely, BBS is a type of social phobia, meaning the paruretic is usually shy and fears being scrutinized or criticized by others when performing in public, in this case, urinating in a public restroom. The psychological conflict that generates this particular form of social

phobia is expressed through the physical symptom of being unable to urinate whenever the person desires.

The experience of BBS varies somewhat from person to person; however, certain general patterns are evident. First, BBS occurs mostly in public restrooms, but it can also occur in the homes of friends and relatives, or even at home if visitors are nearby or a family member is waiting for the paruretic. Typically, though, she or he finds the home bathroom to be the only truly safe toilet the only place where the paruretic is consistently able to void.

Second, BBS ranges in intensity from mild, in which the person can urinate in public facilities under certain circumstances, to severe, in which the person can only urinate when alone at home. Thus the degree of BBS hesitancy ranges from a momentary delay in initiating the process to chronic and acute retention. Most people occasionally experience at least some hesitancy in public restrooms, but this differs from BBS in the matter of degree and context.

Wait



A person who every now and then must wait an extra second or two before being able to urinate is not a paruretic. Rather, BBS is often a life-long condition characterized by excessive hesitancy or a total inability to urinate. The problem also causes distress over everyday activities like travel, social engagements, long business meetings, and interferes in a significant way with the paruretics ability to carry on with these normal activities.

Third, most paruretics describe a personal comfort threshold required for urinating, whether in public facilities or at home. When this comfort threshold is eclipsed by too many negatives in a particular situation such as noise, odors, lack of visual privacy, and other people in the restroom talking, BBS kicks in and prevents the person from urinating at that time.

Seek a medical evaluation before attempting to treat bashful bladder problem. Rule out a medical condition before diagnosing paruresis. However, a general rule of thumb is that if you can go at home when alone without a problem, but have difficulties in most or all social situations, then you probably suffer from paruresis.

Common Therapy

The most commonly used treatment for bashful bladder involves the individual gradually attempting to urinate in more and more difficult locations. This treatment is usually called behavioral exposure therapy. Each session of exposure therapy involves several attempts at briefly urinating.

For those suffering from paruresis or who know of someone who suffers from this social phobia, there are things one can do:

Visit our website at <http://www.paruressis.org> and get the latest information about this anxiety disorder. There is an moderated discussion group accessible through the website, as well as a place to ask questions.

If you already havent done so, start talking to your loved ones, friends, relatives, and co-workers about paruresis.

British Toilet Association (BTA)

www.britloos.co.uk

Campaigning for better public toilets for all! Britain's public toilets were once the envy of the world. In recent years, significant numbers of public toilets have been closed down. We need more and better toilets. Let's stop the rot!

Why does Britain need more and better toilets? There are an increasing number of specialist user groups, whose lives are affected by the state of Britain's public toilets. These include people with mental or physical disabilities and their carers; the infirm or elderly; people with babies or young children and people of all ages who are coping with a range of medical conditions. More:

- Britain's population has an increasingly significant 'ageing' profile
- Residents travel more within the country, and the number of visitors to Britain increases each year, placing added pressure on our existing toilet facilities
- Public health and hygiene, as well as environmental issues, are constantly in the news, with increasing media interest in all matters relating to public toilets
- Public toilets are the 'shop window' for any area or establishment - where first and lasting impressions of levels of customer care are made

Our mission is to represent the interests and aspirations of 'away from home' toilet providers, suppliers and users of all types and to act as the catalyst for change in the pursuit of standards of excellence in all areas of public toilet provision and management.

The UK-wide search for the best 'away from home' toilets - the much sought after 'Loo of the Year Awards' - has just been launched by competition organisers - The British Toilet Association. Now in their seventeenth year, the Loo of the Year Awards have eighteen different categories, covering every type of location used by staff, members of the public or visitors - including offices, schools, hospitals, pubs, shops and, of course, public toilets provided by Local Authorities. East Lothian Council in Scotland was last year's overall winner.

Find out more at <http://www.britloos.co.uk/news/may2003topttoilets.html>

If you have any comments, or wish to volunteer for RAS, please call 68411621 or e-mail to info@toilet.org.sg

Restroom Association of Singapore's tongue-in-cheek approach is a breath of fresh air

By STEPHANIE LIM
linj@sph.com.sg

TOILET humour may be a dirty word. But Mr Jack Sim (right), founder and President of the Restroom Association of Singapore (RAS), and his 30-odd volunteers at the RAS, embrace it readily.

Formed in 1998 in response to PM Goh's call for the social graciousness of Singapore to be measured according to the cleanliness of our public toilets, the RAS takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to its campaigns and activities.

Posters for the RAS by Saatchi and Saatchi had men in roach and rat costumes standing in toilets, with the slogan: Dirty toilets attract the wrong crowd.

When they have conferences, Mr Sim comes up with witty visuals, like a toilet with footprints on the seat and the caption "Kung-fu in the Ladies"; or a picture of a cistern filled with fish illustrating the debate over eco-friendly toilets.

And their own tagline provokes a small smile: "It's Everybody's Business!"

Serious message

In fact, they deemed themselves funny enough to be featured on popular TV sitcom Phua Chu Kang, appointing Pierre Png's character Phua Chu Beng the president of the RAS in response to his toilet design.

"The subject itself is already a very-hard-to-swallow subject, so humour is one of the best tools," said Mr Sim.

"The first reaction of people is always to laugh at us, 'Are you joking?'"

"Then, as we talk to them, they realise that we are serious."

The RAS' Executive Director, Mr Colin See, said most of his friends are perplexed at first. "They say, 'Huh?', if I tell them that I'm with the RAS, but it graduates to an 'Oh' if I mention that we are an authority on clean toilets.

"Comments peak at 'That's cool' or 'You're doing a good thing' if they understand the need for clean toilets."

He added: "We think that toilet humour can first break the ice but afterwards can send a message very well."

But does the use of humour detract from the seriousness of the issue?

"Academics, environmentalists, town planners and policy makers do not joke when talking about building more toilets in remote areas to alleviate problems that contribute to pollution," replied Mr See.

Fair enough. Toilets in off-the-beaten-track places certainly keep the environment smelling sweeter, preventing people from answering nature's call by returning to nature.

Presently, the RAS runs the Happy Toilet Program, visiting toilets to assess their standards, awarding "Happy Toilet Awards" of three to five stars.

Inspection of toilets is done by the volunteers, who go out weekly to suss out about four or five toilets.

As one of only two full-time staff members, executive director Colin See makes these expeditions daily, spending about 40% off his time inspecting restrooms.

The RAS also liaises with grassroots organisations and the school authorities to organise exhibitions and other activities promoting toilet hygiene.

Later this year, it will also implement the National Skills Recognition System for the industry to train people in toilet design.

Humour him: Have a laugh in the loo

"As a private, non-profit organisation, we do not have any authority to enforce toilet-improvement measures," said Mr See.

However, for the past few months, the RAS and the National Environment Agency (NEA) have been jointly reviewing the Code of Practice for toilet owners and developers.

When the revisions are complete, the successful recommendations of the RAS will be effective law. Said Mr Sim: "This is a de facto legislative function."

Songs, dances, pantomime

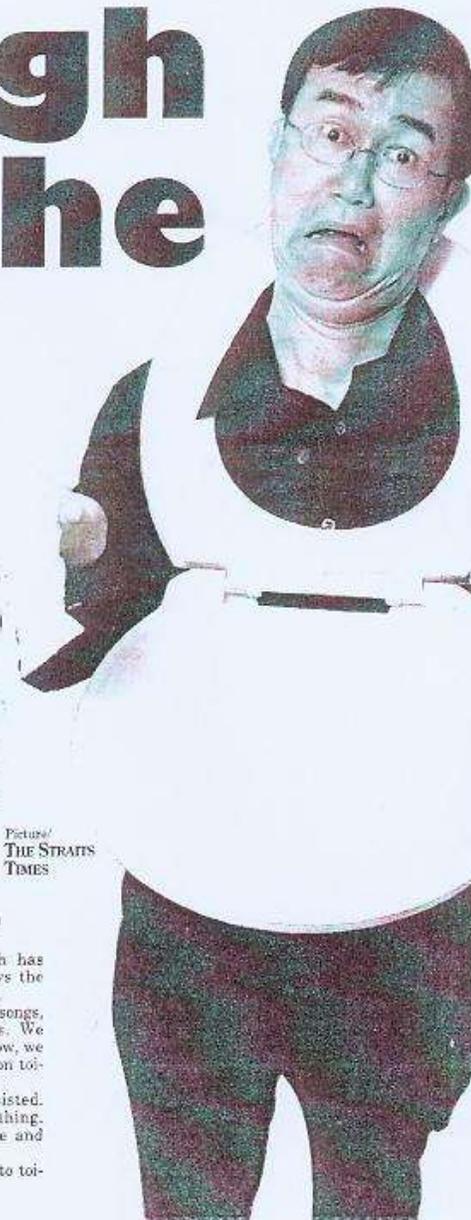
And while the humorous approach has worked wonders so far, Mr Sim says the RAS will be diversifying its approach.

"We also hope to use the arts — songs, dances, pantomimes and paintings. We should use every possible resource. Now, we are planning a serious documentary on toilets."

"But it's not a departure," he insisted. "We're not moving away from anything. We're just piling up more and more and more," he added cheekily.

"There's nothing that isn't related to toilets."

Picture/
THE STRAITS
TIMES



S'poreans can be coaxed the funny way

COMMENT
By SUE VIA TOH PAIK CHOO
tp@spfi.com.sg

SINGAPORE got hope! It's cheerful news, indeed, to learn that a voluntary group of civic-conscious people have tackled — bottoms up — a dirty social habit and emerged flush with success.

And all done with lavatory walls laughter.

The RAS is good, clean proof that, first, we do have a sense of humour and, second, that we don't have to live in a fine city for the city to be fine.

RAS' enlightened, lighthearted approach has helped put the lid on pressure — the pressure of fines and punishment, an all too common backdrop to many a campaign and policy.

Threats

We are one of the few countries in the world — if not the only — which has to annually remind its citizens to be courteous.

We are exhorted to be polite, we are threatened not to spit.

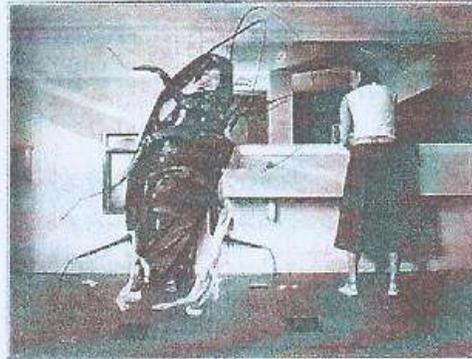
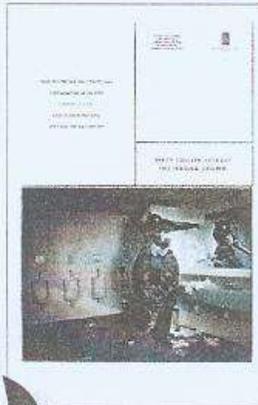
Well, what do you know, not such a rude shock after all, that we can be coaxed and cajoled into doing the right thing, and for the community, into thinking of others before self, all without being browbeaten with a stick or teased with a carrot.

If RAS can aim to please by getting you to aim too, please — is it too much to hope that other civic groups are even now forming committees to take on, say, getting residents to smile at each other in the lifts?

You can start the ball rolling by prodding the next person you meet in the elevator with a couple of test tickles.

The subject itself is already a very-hard-to-swallow subject, so humour is one of the best tools. The first reaction of people is always to laugh at us, 'Are you joking?'. Then, as we talk to them, they realise that we are serious.

— Mr Jack Sim, founder and President of the Restroom Association of Singapore



WITTY: Posters for the Restroom Association of Singapore by Saatchi and Saatchi had men in roach and rat costumes standing in toilets, with the slogan: Dirty toilets attract the wrong crowd.

S'pore gets other countries loving loos with help of world body

THE World Toilet Organisation (WTO) was formed in 2001 at the suggestion of Mr Jack Sim, making it the first world body to be founded in Singapore.

Its activities are recognised and supported by the UN Environmental Program.

It comprises 17 members from 14 countries.

Some are fully-fledged toilet associations like those of Singapore, Japan and Britain.

Some are bodies concerned with more general issues like sanitation, as in the case of India-based Sulabh International, while others focus on specific issues, as the Paruresis Society from the US (Paruresis

means severe phobia of public toilets).

Like its member bodies, the WTO aims to spread awareness about and encourage research into toilet hygiene and design.

The WTO also holds an annual World Toilet Summit. This was held for the first time in Singapore in 2001.

Space-age toilets

Last year, it was held in Taiwan, and this year's summit will be held in Beijing.

Themes for the various World Toilet Summits include the importance of toilets to the image of a country, remote toilets in mountain areas, and toilets of the future.

Source: The New Paper on Sunday, 15 February 2004, Singapore. Visit <http://newpaper.asia1.com.sg/> & <http://www.asiaone.com>