



Ready for the resorts

Polytechnic lecturer Christy Chung is furthering her studies in hospitality management, not only to widen her horizons, but also to equip her students for careers in the service industry

By DAWN WONG

WITH Singapore's two integrated resorts scheduled to open soon, the opportunity to pursue further studies in hospitality management could not have arrived at a better time for polytechnic lecturer Christy Chung.

She had taken leave from the Ngee Ann Polytechnic to start her one-year Master of Management in Hospitality programme in May, at the Cornell-Nanyang Institute of Hospitality Management (CNI) at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

CNI is an alliance between Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration and NTU's Nanyang Business School.

The first of its kind in Singapore, the master's programme aims to groom middle and senior management talent for the hospitality industry.

Students not only spend time studying at the NTU and at Cornell in the United States, they are also required to go on an industrial attachment.

For Ms Chung, 31, her full-time studies are relevant in more ways than one.

First, she points out that "the service industry is increasingly being recognised as the next engine for

economic growth, more so when the integrated resorts are up and running come 2009".

Second, the lecturer, who had taught financial accounting subjects since 2001, has been asked to teach in the new tourism and resort management diploma programme at the polytechnic after she finishes her studies.

Ms Chung, who is specialising in revenue management for her master's degree, will have to teach a new module called hospitality accounting under the diploma programme.

Revenue management is but one of five specialisations that she and her course-mates can choose from. The others are marketing, entrepreneurship, operations and real estate finance.

Each specialisation is supervised by a leading academic of that field, who helps the students in many areas, such as arranging for regular exchanges with industry leaders and offering advice on which modules to pursue.

Ms Chung says: "It is amazing the lengths that both schools (NTU and Cornell) go to arrange the meetings, roundtables and one-to-one 'speed-dating' opportunities with leading practitioners in the respective career specialisations.

"The first-hand insights that we

get, and of course, the many job opportunities, are invaluable. We have witnessed very attractive job offers during the first meetings."

As Ms Chung will be returning to her polytechnic upon graduation, she has used the networking sessions for her students' benefit. Together with the relevant industrial partners, she is exploring possible overseas attachments in China for her students.

"I really want to bring something tangible back for the students rather than just getting a degree for myself," she says.

"I have witnessed great transformation in my students who have gone on such an attachment. They were immature and not confident, but they became so poised and confident after just an eight-week attachment. It can make a big difference to their lives!"

In fact, she has witnessed a transformation in her own personality, having already spent a few months at Cornell.

She says: "Before I went for this course, my colleagues said I was always one who went with the flow. But in the US, I had to fight to speak and make my point. It really honed my communication skills and identity, and the way I thought about issues."

Going back to school has certainly not been easy for the mother of three, who is currently expecting her fourth child. She misses her children terribly when she is in the US for part of her studies. Her children are aged six, four and two.

Ms Chung, who obtained her first degree in accounting from the NTU, says she had decided on the master's programme to upgrade herself. Seeing her husband do his master's degree gave her the "final push" to do the same, she says.

With support from him as well as her classmates and faculty members, she is sure she can pull through.

She says: "CNI's dean, Dr Judy Siguaw, has been supportive of my decision to have my baby and my degree at the same time. I can't thank her enough for this.

"And to my hubby: 'My dream will remain so without your support!' He's been amazing!"



PHOTO: CHRISTY CHUNG

Ms Christy Chung (left) with CNI's Professor Sheryl Kimes, who specialises in revenue management.