

# Scientist bags top youth award

## Stem cell expert among four winners honoured this year

TWO scientists who have made waves in the field of stem cell research – one of whom had mentored the other – were honoured yesterday at the Singapore Youth Awards.

Dr Loh Yuin Han, 33, received the youth award for his contribu-

tions to science and technology.

At the ceremony, his former mentor, Dr Ng Huck Hui, 38, who had won the same award in 2005, got the medal of commendation – given to past youth award winners who have surpassed their previous accomplishments.

The youth award, presented by the National Youth Council, is the nation's highest accolade for those aged 35 and under, recognising outstanding achievements in arts and culture, community and youth services, entrepreneurship,

science and technology, and sports and adventure.

The other winners are film director Royston Tan, 33, entrepreneur and founder of PurpleClick Media Leonard Tan, 31, and Paralympic swimmer Yip Pin Xiu, 18.

Speaking to reporters at a media conference last week, Dr Loh – who already has several national-level science awards under his belt – said he was humbled by this particular honour.

He described himself as a student with “bipolar” results in sec-

ondary school, aceing science, which he had a passion for, but doing poorly in other subjects, even failing his O-level English.

Dr Loh has gone on to gain international recognition for his research – he was the first in the world to successfully convert human blood cells to pluripotent stem cells, similar to embryonic stem cells, for research in diseases.

He cited his secondary school science teacher who taught him to question textbooks, as well as Dr

Ng, whom he had worked with for five years at the Genome Institute of Singapore, as influences on his career.

Since Dr Ng won the youth award in 2005, he and his team have developed different methods of converting non-stem cells into stem cells.

He said in an e-mail reply to The Straits Times that he was “exceedingly proud” of Dr Loh’s achievements.

Said Dr Ng: “I have learnt a lot from my mentors, and I hope to

pay this forward to benefit my trainees.”

Contributing to the community and going the extra mile beyond excellence in a given field are factors looked for by the judges who noted that the winners had promoted their field of their own accord or done community service.

This year’s youth award winners were picked from 93 nominations, while the medal of commendation was picked from nine nominations.

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## Leonard Tan: Top young entrepreneur

ENTREPRENEUR Leonard Tan left a promising career at Internet giant Yahoo to start his own business in 2006.

By 2007, the 31-year-old’s online marketing agency PurpleClick Media, which helps small and medium-sized enterprises market their businesses through online search engines, was accredited by Google and Yahoo.

It was the first company in the region to have achieved such recognition.

In less than four years, his company has grown from a two-man set-up to one with a staff strength of more than 20.

He was named one of Asia’s Top 25 Best Young Entrepreneurs by magazine BusinessWeek in 2008.

Mr Tan is also a big believer in sharing his experiences, through giving talks in schools and offering employment to budding entrepreneurs.



The winners of the Singapore Youth Award this year are (from left) entrepreneur Leonard Tan, film-maker Royston Tan, scientist Loh Yuin Han and athlete Yip Pin Xiu (not in photo). ST PHOTO: AIDAH RAUF

## Royston Tan: Award-winning film-maker

FILM-MAKER Royston Tan, 33, has struck a chord with Singaporeans through films like 881 on the local getai scene, and his more infamous 15, about a group of teenage gangsters, which went through more than 20 cuts before the censors would allow it to be screened in Singapore.

He has received more than 60 awards for his films, and was named Young Artist of the Year by the National Arts Council in 2002.

In his spare time, he provides free film-making classes to troubled youths and supports various charities like The Business Times Budding Artists Fund.

## Dr Loh Yuin Han: Ground-breaking work in stem cell research

HE WAS not a good student, yet Dr Loh Yuin Han, 33, persevered and went on to become a scientist known for his work in the field of human embryonic stem cells.

He was the first in the world to convert human blood cells to pluripotent stem cells, similar to embryonic stem cells, for research in diseases.

For his achievements, he was awarded the Singapore Young Scientist Award last year and the Philip Yeo Prize in 2008.

Part of the cash prize money from his award last year was donated to set up science awards in his alma mater Bukit View Secondary School in Bukit Batok.

## Yip Pin Xiu: Paralympic gold medallist

YIP Pin Xiu, 18, did not let her muscular dystrophy get the better of her.

Instead, she became one of Singapore’s top athletes, taking home the gold medal in backstroke at the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing.

She was named Sports

Girl of the Year from 2005 to 2007 and was also conferred the National Colours Award from 2006 to 2008.

The other awards she has garnered include the Meritorious Service Medal BBM in 2008 and the Her World Young Women Achievers Award last year.

