Perfect timing

By Michael Gibb

From baking a successful cake, telling a joke to investing in stock, timing is everything, a fact about which Professor Gregory Raupp, the new Vice-President (Research and Technology) and Dean of Graduate Studies at CityU, is altogether very aware.

“The invitation to come to work at CityU came at exactly the right moment,” said Professor Raupp, who joined CityU on 14 February after 26 years at Arizona State University (ASU). “I was looking for a new challenge in my professional life and my daughter had recently moved to Iowa where she works in nursing. It was a good time to broaden my horizons and take on the next big thing.”

In his highly distinguished career at ASU, Professor Raupp was the leader and principal architect of the pioneering Flexible Display Center, a unique venture providing unprecedented design for a new generation of revolutionary information displays. In addition to his position as Professor of Chemical Engineering, he was Associate Vice President for Research and Director of Strategic Materials Research Initiatives.

(continued on next page)
But a number of aspects of the CityU position proved attractive enough for him to leave Arizona, home to the Grand Canyon, stunning natural landscapes and a rich Native American and Spanish heritage. “Hong Kong has an incredible ‘Wow!’ factor, especially visually, and the whole place bustles with energy. I liked that CityU was a relatively young institution with strong leadership, a clearly defined mission and evident linkages with top universities on the mainland and around the world,” he said.

Despite having arrived in Hong Kong just a week before Linkage caught up with him, Professor Raupp had already dived into the heart of Hong Kong. While work is the top priority, he has used his free time to find out what makes Hong Kong tick.

“I’ve done some hiking, taken the ferry out to one of the islands for a seafood lunch, strolled around the TST harbourside and explored the little outdoor restaurants in the city. It’s all new to me and I love it,” he said.

Anyone who has taken up a post overseas will appreciate that moving to a new country is a complicated business, but Professor Raupp has found the transition fulfilling. “I’ve had a chance to take stock of what is important to me and brought with me to CityU only the essentials,” he said. “Like a lot of academics I tend to live in my head but music and sport are always with me. I find both to be meditative experiences that help to keep me grounded.”

A keen ice-hockey player, a long-distance runner and an experienced practitioner of tai chi, Professor Raupp plays acoustic and electronic guitar and keyboards. “I brought three of my six guitars and an electronic keyboard to Hong Kong, but left my baby grand piano back home to be refurbished. It’s been in the family since the 1920s.”

He said he is also looking forward to showing his daughter around, too—“We Skype three or four times a week, so we don’t seem that far apart,” he said—and perhaps brushing the dust off his Mandarin. “I took some introductory level classes a few years ago so it will be fun to revisit that area once again,” he said.

Arizona and its clean desert air are a far cry from the teeming metropolis in which CityU stands, a prospect that Professor Raupp said he finds appealing.

“I have a wonderful opportunity to bring to CityU my experience as a leader in the academic research enterprise. It’s not just the right time, this is the right place. The great adventure of working with my CityU colleagues, students and collaborators as we move forward together in the years to come is my next (and last) big thing.”
CityU hops to Rabbit celebrations

By Joan Yip

A traditional Chinese lion dance, live music and the Chinese God of Wealth set up a festive atmosphere at the Chinese New Year Staff Party on 11 February, with over 1,000 faculty and staff celebrating the start of the Year of the Rabbit in great style.

The party is a CityU institution, bringing together colleagues at the start of the Lunar New Year to meet, chat and share the festive spirit.

Starting off the celebrations was a hearty buffet of traditional delicacies such as deep-fried sesame dumplings and turnip cakes. The festivities then moved to the Chan Tai Ho Multi-purpose Hall for an extravagant performance by a lion dance troupe. The dance is supposed to bring good luck and prosperity for the coming year.

This year the audience also enjoyed the captivating rhythms of a Chinese percussion and drum performance by a local ensemble, 4 Gig Heads Percussion Group, plus an enchanting a cappella performance by a local music group, Gay Singers.

Mr Bernard Lee Sin-chuen, Human Resources Manager, said his office, the organiser of the event, had brought in a diverse group of performers to boost the festive spirit.

In his address to the audience, Professor Way Kuo, University President, quoted four auspicious Chinese idioms and wished everyone a long and prosperous life, one that was both happy and healthy.

The party ended on a high note with the lucky draw. The winner was Mr Lam Kwok-fai, Technical Officer of the Department of Biology and Chemistry.

1. The Chinese God of Wealth hands out chocolate gold coins and candy for good luck and fortune.
2. Professor Kuo and the senior management offer Chinese New Year greetings to CityU colleagues.
3. Professor Kuo wishes everyone a long and prosperous life.
4. Drums heat up the party atmosphere.
5. Staff enjoy the refreshments at the party.
Creating student success stories

By Alex Tham Kay-siong

An effective means of encouraging learning is to help students create their own success stories. It builds confidence, extends potential, broadens horizons and develops interpersonal and social responsibility skills.

New students joining the Department of Marketing are invited to an individual meal with me. We review their plans and chat about their strengths and weaknesses, learning experiences, ways of thinking, dreams and what they consider the factors needed for them to achieve their goals. These chats give the students a chance to reflect. Quite often, getting a university place is goal in itself, and having secured a place, some students feel at a loss. Graduation is still a long way off and motivation levels can fall. Though they have a “big dream”, they may have little or no idea how to achieve it.

So we break down their long-term goals into short-term objectives and we emphasise the “Big Seven” of life at university: practical experience, international exposure, good GPA, awards and scholarships, involvement in the university community, language improvement and social responsibility. We set milestones and issue regular reminders to help put the students on their path to success.

Of course, setting goals is easy; sticking to them is more difficult. But we can motivate students to follow their plans by showing that we genuinely care and are willing to provide the necessary support. In addition, the students gain practical experience through consultancy projects, regular business leader forums, meals with successful business and social leaders, and valuable internship opportunities.

We also ensure there is plenty of support for students going on exchanges and we monitor progress in their English level, too. We ask our students to read and present at least one English book during the summer of the second year at CityU and submit their reflections on the book to my Active Learning Program on my online e-Student Relationship Management System, which was set up in 2000. I assess their efforts and two English teachers comment on the quality of the writing.

We also coach students for external competitions and awards. I have found that students become more motivated when they see other students’ success stories in the media. In addition, we inculcate a sense of belonging through career development camps and involvement in departmental committees.

Helping students create their own success stories is more than just an approach to teaching. It is a matter of the heart. It is never an easy journey and there are many obstacles, but the more care you offer, the better the students respond.
Unconscious consciousness

By Gabriel Wu (Assistant Professor, Department of Chinese, Translation and Linguistics)

Following a sunset poetry reading organised by a local literary group called the Kubrick Poetry Club, a member of the audience asked me what poetry meant to me. I had been reading from my recent collection Ban Cun Zai (A Half-Existence) at a bookstore in Yau Ma Tei, and in reply I said, “It is part of my life”.

Perhaps my reply was too dull and unexciting, and didn’t satisfy the audience’s expectations. But I thought it aptly described how my pulse beat and my blood flowed when I replied to the question. Although physically indoors, standing between the spotlight and microphone, I could sense a spring breeze gently blowing to bring forth leaves so green that they could not be greener as I seemed to see the ever-changing sunlight radiating through the twigs and branches.

I could never relinquish this “part”, expressed as part and parcel in English, something which is important and essential, just as I could not ever give up academic research, which is part of my life, too.

I bumped into a colleague after I bought a coffee following my meal, and was heading back to my office in the To Yuen Building. We exchanged greetings and then said our goodbyes, and I returned to my usual footsteps. Such an encounter is also part (and parcel) of life.

This “part” gently breathes in an existence where time slips, like grains of sand through one’s fingers, exhaling unnecessary exaggerations and inhaling a soothing sense of calm. Unconscious consciousness—if I may use an oxymoron—can be felt to be as fine as a single droplet of water clinging to the eaves of a house or as vast as deep rivers and expansive oceans.

Night falls. My kitten leaps onto my lap, curling up to sleep. The only sound is that of my fingers tapping at the keyboard. “I am a part of poetry,” I write.

Sorrow of Tides

By Gabriel Wu from Ban Cun Zai (A Half-Existence)

Deep into the heart of moods
And too close to the seasons
Ever since that Adonis-lyrist long, long ago
Dress, hands and feet – all overgrown
with metaphors damp and painful

I greet the autumn leaves whirling in the air
But on the maple’s sunny side, imagination stops
Leaving behind the whimper that’s left semantics
to follow the wandering winds
The leather gloves are thrust into time
Slowly turning thinner, and colder, and distant
Yet much kinder than those sentences
laboured and piled up
As their looks are easy to recognise

Gaining wisdom day by day, like an apple ripening
Till it’s clear, and crispy, and bright
As it’s fulfilling, so it’s decaying
The blades of grass are tossing and surging
Yet I can spell out their waves – or sea tides rising
Again and again, I feel the trout’s heart throbbing

(Trans. Allen Zhuang)
SRIB foundations built on team spirit

By Eliza Lee

The City University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen) Research Institute Building (CityU SRIB) located in Shenzhen Virtual University Science Park became CityU’s permanent base on the mainland after it was formally opened on 20 January.

Countless people have invested a huge amount of time and effort into transforming what was a patch of barren land five years ago into a vibrant locale where the eight-storey CityU SRIB edifice now stands.

One of the teams involved in the project is particularly worthy of our gratitude: the site supervision section of Campus Development and Facilities Office (CDFO) at CityU.

“Thanks to the co-operation and collective effort of all our colleagues, this project has been a great success,” said Mr Leo Wong Kwok-leung, Facilities Manager at CDFO. Mr Wong said he is immensely proud of all that he and his team have achieved over the years, pointing out that “various projects by Hong Kong universities are located in Shenzhen Virtual University Science Park but CityU’s is the first building to open there”.

CityU formally entered Shenzhen Virtual University Science Park in 2000. In 2005, the Shenzhen Municipal Government granted CityU around 5,300 square meters of land for construction purposes.

“At the beginning, we only knew that a piece of land would be granted,” Mr Wong said. “The area where the Virtual University Science Park now stands was pretty much waste land a few years ago. We weren’t even clear about the exact location of the land.” Mr Wong and his team eventually began a site investigation in February 2006.

Hong Kong and Shenzhen laws differ, as do the practices of site supervision.

Although Mr Wong had many years’ experience in site and construction management, he needed to learn the new approaches from scratch.

“In Hong Kong, the responsibility for quality control and handling relevant documents and construction projects lies mainly with architectural consultants and construction companies,” he said.

“But on the mainland, we had to hire local supervisory companies as agents. They managed quality control and prepared the necessary documents for submission to the government.”

Another example of the kind of differences faced was insurance coverage.

Although Mr Wong mentioned China’s unique construction environment, he also talked about the collaborative spirit of his team.

“Despite the challenges, our team worked together and we soon developed a system that worked. This experience not only helped us build the SRIB building, but also prepared us for future projects.”

People

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In Hong Kong, insurance must be secured before a project begins, but this practice does not exist in Shenzhen. “We opted to take out insurance, but had no clear understanding of Shenzhen’s insurance companies and their systems before we got started so the process of getting insurance involved a considerable number of twists and turns,” Mr Wong added.

Mr Wong has helped supervise most of CityU’s major, and minor, construction projects over the past 20 years, but the SRIB project has been the most challenging, he said.

“The procedures for constructing buildings on the mainland are complex, and the culture in the industry is different to that in Hong Kong” he said. “In Shenzhen, there are specific inspection procedures for approving building structures such as waterproofing, steel structures, glass walls, environmental protection, energy saving and lightning resistance. We had to make sure that the construction, supervisory and consultant and design companies had followed the right procedures before the building was checked by the government. As a result, the SRIB project required much more attention than previous projects I had been responsible for!”

Today, travelling from Kowloon Tong to SRIB by public transportation takes one hour. However, a round trip took four to five hours before the opening of the Hong Kong–Shenzhen Western Corridor. “In the early stages of the project, the site was literally in the middle of wasteland. We didn’t even have a potable water supply so we had to take our food and liquid refreshments with us every day,” he said.

But, rather than be overwhelmed, Mr Wong’s team rose to the challenge. They applied themselves meticulously to every aspect of management and supervision, and eventually, after four years’ hard work, the notice informing the team that the last of the building checks had been certified arrived. That was last November. With the government’s seal of approval, SRIB was ready.

Today, graduate school students and several research and development centres are already housed in the building. No wonder that when SRIB opened, to positive feedback from satisfied users, Mr Wong was a very happy man.

“I am very proud of our team,” Mr Wong said.