SMU, NUS to pay tribute to late Kwa Geok Choo

By UMA SHANKARI

SINGAPORE Management University (SMU) and National University of Singapore (NUS) will pay tribute to the late Kwa Geok Choo, wife of former prime minister and minister mentor Lee Kuan Yew.

SMU will name its new law library, a new scholars programme and a top law graduate award after her. NUS will establish a professorship in property law, a distinguished visitors programme, bursaries and scholarships in honour of the late Madam Kwa, an alumna of the university.

“This tribute is befitting of her achievements and the values she held dear. While the former prime minister and minister mentor Lee Kuan Yew has been credited for taking Singapore ‘from third world to first’, Madam Kwa can share in that acclaim for standing by her spouse and assisting him through the development of the nation,” said SMU and NUS in a joint statement.

Madam Kwa was an esteemed lawyer and a brilliant student, the two universities said. In 1936, she topped the Senior Cambridge Exam for the whole of Malaya and Singapore.

She then enrolled in Raffles College, a predecessor institution of NUS, in 1940 and resumed her studies there in 1946 after the end of World War II. In 1947, she graduated from Raffles College with a first class diploma in arts, winning the Queen’s Scholarship to study law at Cambridge University, where she became the first Asian woman to graduate with first class honours in law.

“Madam Kwa’s intellect and fortitude shone through as she applied herself in the legal arena. She was a pioneer who started a law firm with Mr Lee and his younger brother, and then went on to excel as a conveyancing lawyer, mentoring many others in the process,” SMU and NUS said.

Kwa Kim Li, managing partner of Lee & Lee and niece of the late Madam Kwa, said that her family is “deeply touched” by the initiatives.

“She (Madam Kwa) was a brilliant lawyer, an amazing lady, a visionary ahead of her time. A lady made of steel and silk in equal parts. Much as my aunt shied away from being in the spotlight, she would have been very honoured by this,” Ms Kwa said.