

# She cares where it matters

Award-winning entrepreneur Serena Wee likes to help others through her business

## Wong Sher Maine

MS SERENA Wee is in the business of helping breast cancer patients feel normal after their treatment.

She sells wigs for hair lost through chemotherapy, prosthetic breasts to pad up hollow brassieres and swimwear with pockets for breast pads through her company, Can-care.

People think she makes a lot of money. Says Ms Wee, who won the Spirit of Enterprise award in 2003: "People think it's a lucrative business because so many people get cancer. But it's not."

Indeed, when the 40-year-old and two other partners started Can-care in 1997, it was an uphill struggle.

"It was tough, no one wanted to talk about cancer," she says.

"Even the doctors, who are very important because they have to refer patients to us, would ask us why we are doing this and were sceptical. Some would even say, a life saved is more important. What is one breast?"

But the former healthcare administrator carried on, not least because she saw there was a need for the service. "It's a one-stop shop for ladies who have had breast cancer."

Even today, she says, she is hardly raking in profits. "If I wanted to make a lot of money, I would not be doing this.



Ms Wee believes in giving back to society and having a positive influence on the community. PHOTO: SERENA WEE

"We put back a lot of what we earn into the business and I would call ourselves a social enterprise."

What is more important to Ms Wee, however, is helping the cancer patients.

Over the years, there are

many women who have attended the free "Look good, feel better" workshops by Can-care, which is now under the auspices of the Singapore Cancer Society.

Trained cosmetologists conduct workshops to teach

make-up techniques to the women whose skin colour may have changed and who lose their eyebrows to chemotherapy.

The Can-care professionals offer tips on hair care, use of wigs and various headgear.

Says Ms Wee: "In any business, you need to be profitable to be sustainable. But you can also contribute back to society, have a positive influence on the community."

It is for this reason that Ms Wee is also an active volunteer with the Spirit of Enterprise's student entrepreneur programme, whereby schools are provided with seed funding and mentors to run a business programme.

Ms Wee, who gives talks at the Methodist Girls' School, has helped the students to organise a talent event, and she is helping them to produce a compact disc on the event.

When it comes to imbuing the young with entrepreneurship ideals, she says: "A lot of people think entrepreneurship is starting a shop, but it's more than that.

"It's also about generating ideas, how to come up with a marketing plan, money management, fund raising, being responsible for something.

"We want the kids to go through the process to learn what is involved in entrepreneurship."