We felt as graduates that this place belonged to us. NTU was just a transient tenant.'

- DR CHEE PHUI HUNG, 83, an NUS alumnus who studied physics and chemistry on the Bukit Timah campus (above) in 1940. The announcement by Dr Tony Tan during a reunion dinner of NUS alumni was received with loud cheers (left).
NUS beats NTU to Bukit Timah campus

NUS needs the space more, says DPM Tan; its business and law schools to move there

Jeremy Au Yong

AFTER a year of lobbying by both sides, the National University of Singapore (NUS) has beaten Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in their competing claims on the historic Bukit Timah campus.

NUS will move its law and business schools there after the current occupier, Singapore Management University (SMU), vacates the site later this year.

Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan — a University of Singapore alumnus himself — made the announcement last night on the Bukit Timah campus during a reunion dinner for graduates who had studied there.

The 600 or so alumni gathered there leapt to their feet, applauded, cheered and raised their glasses in a unified "yam seng."

A delighted Mrs Belinda Charles said: "That's great! This is our campus. A campus is not just made of buildings, it is made of great memories." The 55-year-old principal of St Andrew's School studied English at Bukit Timah in 1971.

It took nearly five minutes for the noise to subside, before the minister could continue his speech.

"I take it from your applause that this is a popular decision," he quipped.

The two schools had been locked in a battle for SMU's current home since early last year. NTU had wanted the site for its business school.

Both claimed strong links with the site. Predecessors of NUS — Raffles College, University of Malaya and the University of Singapore — had occupied the campus between 1929 and 1981. The National Institute of Education, which is part of NTU, used the campus from 1982 to 2000.

Dr Tan stressed that the Government had considered the options carefully before giving it to NUS. It won out because it needed the space more.

He said the NUS undergraduate population at Kent Ridge has now grown to 22,000, which is larger than the number for which the NUS Kent Ridge campus was built for.

NTU's current campus in Jurong, meanwhile, still has sufficient space for its expansion plans.

For the NUS alumni present last night, there was never any question over whose claim was stronger.

Said Dr Chee Phui Hung, 83, who studied physics and chemistry on the Bukit Timah campus in 1940: "We felt as graduates that this place belonged to us. NTU was just a transient tenant."

Mr Harry Chan, 78, an arts graduate from the class of 1950, called the decision "climactic."

The former ambassador said: "Raffles College was first formed here to commemorate 100 years of the founding of Singapore. Now we are going back again after another 100 years. This is really a homecoming."