



Mrs Mary Ho, 72, taught her seven grandchildren how to play the electric guitar. With her are (seated from left) Frederic, 15, Bertrand, 17, (standing) Desiree, 14, William, 17, and Edward, 18. The other two are overseas. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

## Rockin' grandmas and high-tech grandpas

■ BY MALINI NATHAN

FORGET doddering.

A new generation of grandparents is redefining its role in their grandchildren's lives. They are role models and teachers – a third parent to their grandchildren.

That relationship works both ways too.

Mrs Mary Ho, for instance, taught her seven grandchildren the electric guitar. They taught her how to use Skype.

The 72-year-old calls herself the “on-call grandmother”, and plays counselor, caregiver and chef to her grandchildren.

“I spent so many years taking care of my two daughters. So, when my grandchildren came along, I just continued and took over,” she said. They dote on her, not least because she inspires them.

Mrs Ho learnt to play the guitar when

she was 60 and has since released a Latin-rock album; she is currently recording a blues one.

One of her grandsons, Edward Yeo, 17, called his grandmother “the coolest”, bragging: “Where can you find a grandmother playing the electric guitar on YouTube?”

This changing profile of seniors is not limited to a small group.

Mrs Lucy Lim, 68, is learning to play the piano from one of her 13 grandchildren, Christine Lim, nine, who she considers “strict but very patient”.

Meanwhile, Mr Timothy Tan, 63, sealed his bond with his 11 grandchildren when, to keep him occupied during his recovery from a collapsed lung about two months ago, they pooled resources with his seven nieces and nephews to buy him a computer.

He now surfs the Internet and chats with his granddaughter, Chloe, 17, who is studying in Australia, on MSN almost daily.

“Now I can even send an e-mail on my own,” he said.

Mr Gerard Ee, chairman for Council for Third Age, pointed out that today's seniors “actively engage in various activities”, including “social networking tools to keep in touch with their family and friends”.

They also walk. As many as 5,000 grandparents and their families have signed up for tomorrow's Grandparents' Day Walk, a 1.5km trek organised by Council, which starts at 8am at the Esplanade Park and ends at the Singapore Flyer.

It includes a carnival and live performances by Lela Manje, a senior citizen's band, among other things.

Among its participants is Madam Violet Soon, 55, who is prepared to carry her only granddaughter, aged one, the whole way. “It's a good time for bonding,” she said.

“I'm looking forward to walking with my family, especially my granddaughter.”