

Human Ecology



SUPPORTING NYC

Extension brings Cornell's land-grant mission to the boroughs



Cornell University



Diane Robinson Knapp (left) uses her training as a clinical and administrative dietitian to make an impact at George Washington University.

When Diane Robinson Knapp '74, MS '77, arrived at George Washington University nearly a decade ago, she was given a clean slate.

“Basically, I could do anything I wanted,” says the university’s First Lady, whose husband Steven Knapp, MA ’77, PhD ’81, serves as President.

True to her Cornell training in

nutrition and education and her work as a clinical and administrative dietitian—her

most recent

job in the field was directing the nutrition department at Children’s Hospital in Oakland—the Weedsport, N.Y., native chose to make her mark in food and nutrition, with a strong focus on sustainability.

Knapp’s work began at home. The couple moved from the family’s sheep farm near Baltimore—“Turns out I like farming,” she notes—into F Street House on campus, which was renovated with as many sustainable features as possible. “We try to walk the walk as well as talk the talk,” says Knapp, who sat on a GW sustainability task force during her first year at the university.

Next, Knapp hired University Chef Rob Donis to prepare meals for the many events she hosts, collaborating to offer foods that are healthy and locally sourced.

Since then, Knapp has been working hard to make nutritious fare and sustainable living the standard across the institution. She co-founded and chairs the Urban Food Task Force (UFTF), a campus umbrella organization involving students, staff, and faculty, and has fostered programs and faculty hiring focused on sustainability and nutrition issues in every school.

classes. The Task Force’s flagship event celebrates World Food Day each October with a free pop-up market for families in DC’s Ward 7, which is among the city’s poorest. Under Knapp’s guidance, the market has expanded to offer free health screenings and on-site cooking demos using the produce being given away.

“The science of nutrition is exciting to me, but the field has wider impacts than simply, ‘Eat this, don’t eat that,’” says Knapp. “I’m glad to be part of the movement that helps people see that food affects everything in their lives and shows that what they choose to eat can make a big difference for

themselves and others around the world.”

Over her decade-long tenure, which is concluding after this year, Knapp has inspired many. “The university would not be the sustainability leader it is today without the Knapps’ endless support for green initiatives,” says Eleanor Davis, a recent GW graduate who attributes her passion for sustainable agriculture to Knapp’s mentorship. “Diane advocates for sustainability with a determination and poise that I hope to emulate in my own career.”

As for life after GW, Knapp’s plans are still open. “Something exciting always comes up,” she says. “I’m hoping whatever we decide will allow more time at our farm.”

— *Olivia M. Hall, PhD ’12*

Eating Smart

Diane Robinson Knapp focuses on nutrition as George Washington University First Lady

UFTF works to improve academics and student life by offering food-centered courses and lectures, including collaborations with well-known DC-based chef José Andrés, overhauling dining menus, starting a vegetable garden, and arranging for the weekly on-campus farmers market to accept students’ food service cards. A campus food bank is set to open this fall for students in need, and Donis shows in short videos how to prepare easy nutritious meals on a budget.

But Knapp’s efforts don’t stop at the campus gates. “We need to be good neighbors,” she says. Thus UFTF has developed and implemented the Integrated Food Project, a middle and high school curriculum to teach nutrition issues in a broad range of humanities and science

Urban Food Task Force www.gwu.edu/food-task-force