

# Welcome, Judith Schwank

New Ag Dean has a background in conservation, land preservation

By Brenda Lange

Sharing her respect for the earth is at the core of the career and life of the new Dean for Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at Delaware Valley College. Judy Schwank took over that position on Feb. 1 and has begun implementing strategies to reach the goals she set for herself.

One of her first agenda items is working to link regional consumers to the school's expertise.

"Millions of consumers within the school's reach all use agricultural products of some sort. They have an interest in food security and healthy, good-to-eat food, and the school has expertise in all those areas, and I'm looking forward to making those connections," she said.

Making connections has been a major part of Schwank's professional life. She is well known in Harrisburg power circles, and in her last position worked out of the state capital. She comes to DeVal after

serving as president and CEO of 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting better policy on statewide land use and preservation issues. She knows her links to government are important for DeVal.

"It's an issue of making policy makers aware of the resources the school possesses and the opportunities we have to collaborate on agricultural issues and a whole host of other issues.

"It's important for us to partner with some of those agriculturally related organizations — the Pennsylvania Association of Sustainable Agriculture, Rodale Institute, the Farm Bureau, Granges — to leverage their connections and their abilities to help us provide the best education for our students, as well as the ways the college can 'give back' in terms of expertise. These connections already exist in many cases," she explained. "I just want to enhance them, and strengthen the win-win situation."

Schwank is an expert in the fields of sustainability and land use in the urban/rural interface. Both are additional items on her list. Nearby abandoned industrial sites and urban centers offer opportunities to explore sustainable environmental solutions to problems like land reuse, storm water runoff and deteriorating infrastructure, according to Schwank.

"DeVal is well positioned to educate our students to enter these emerging fields in this new and continually changing economy," she said.

In announcing Schwank's appointment in mid-December, DeVal President Dr. Joseph Brosnan said, "Judy is a smart and experienced administrator who knows how to lead. She has a long history of involvement in agriculture, land preservation and conservation. In addition, she is used to working with state officials in Harrisburg, which is sure to help our college."

This experience with state public officials was gained through her positions as chairperson of both the Pennsylvania State Planning Board, where she served for nine years as an appointee of Gov. Ed Rendell, and the Board of Berks County Commissioners, where she led the drive to obtain funding for the county's Agricultural Land Preservation Program.

Schwank said governmental interest about sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship is at an all-time high.

"There are exciting opportunities for DeVal to capitalize on this interest and the



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Dean Schwank with a student on her first day.

funding resources that are available," she said, adding that she plans to work to access governmental and private funding.

Prior to her work on the Berks County board, Schwank served the Penn State Cooperative Extension in Berks County for 20 years, as both an agent and then director. While there, she developed and managed university-based applied research training programs and curricula. Schwank earned her degrees in agriculture education from Penn State University.

She is a frequent presenter on sustainable land use and appears regularly on local television in the Reading area. Schwank has served on many boards and has been recognized with awards from the Girl Scouts of Southeast Pennsylvania, which gave her the 2003 Women of Distinction Award, and from Alvernia University, a private school in Reading.

Not all of her career has been spent in high-profile jobs, however. Schwank comes with varied experiences as a greenhouse and floral shop employee, a professional pesticide applicator, dairy farm owner, and a developer of farmers markets. In each position, she built community relationships.

"I've been fortunate to have such a diverse career, which brings a broad perspective to my new role. I've benefited from the wisdom of some outstanding mentors, and I've been a hands-on practitioner and advocate — all roles which will help me in dealing with the issues facing higher education, agricultural and environmental sciences."

Delaware Valley College's ongoing mission to provide its students with experience-based learning opportunities underlies Schwank's long-range plan as dean.

"The hands-on learning offered at DeVal has always been ingrained in its philosophy, and I hope to build on the opportunities students are offered here," she said.

Another goal is to encourage interdisciplinary study by working with

other faculty and administrators to forge even stronger links among DeVal's various schools.

"One example might be a student who's interested in a career in communication focused on environmental issues," she said. "Another might be a student wishing to focus on both the practical and scientific sides of green energy."

These students would have the flexibility to choose courses from those offered by the schools of business, education, and arts and sciences, as well as agriculture and environmental sciences, providing them with more choices, including careers in land stewardship, sustainable food systems and organic foods, which she believes the school is well positioned to encourage.

"DeVal has a unique student learner who makes a conscious decision to attend the college because of the diversity in curriculum choices, outstanding faculty and the focus on experiential learning," she concluded. "All the students and alumni I have spoken with feel their education here has prepared them well for the career they have chosen. I'm excited to be working with an institution with such a remarkable story and reputation."

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Schwank takes over from Professor Larry Hepner, who for the past 18 months has been serving as acting dean.

Not surprisingly, Schwank loves to be outdoors in her free time — gardening, walking, hiking — and enjoys the company of her husband, Jim, three grown children and three grandchildren and cooking healthy meals for them all.

