

# Welcome

to the New Jersey Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health

Food for thought...

# What would a world with

**For starters**, we might have fewer cases of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. Our blood pressure might be healthier and our “bad” cholesterol kept at bay. We might sleep a little better at night—not just because we’d have fewer cases of sleep apnea, but also because we’d rest easy knowing that many life-threatening cancers wouldn’t have the ammunition they find in unhealthy weight.

This goal is a worthy one and an achievable one, but it’s also challenging. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), more than two in three adults—and more than one in three kids—in the United States are overweight or obese.

In New Jersey, the news isn’t much better. Obesity rates increased more than 90 percent over the past

15 years, and now more than 15 percent of the state’s children and adolescents are considered obese.

## So what’s the answer?

Here at Rutgers, the answer is attacking obesity and nutrition challenges from all angles—through cross-disciplinary collaboration and real-world community impact—with the formation of the New Jersey Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health (IFNH).

IFNH is a new kind of institute. It pulls faculty, staff, and students from across the university to collaborate on our most pressing health and nutrition issues. Its mission? To transform New Jersey into “the healthy state” and a model for the nation as it rises to the challenge of fighting obesity and optimizing

wellness through the power of nutrition.

“There is a growing appreciation that food and nutrition are an integral part of the human experience, and it is a major theme and factor that affects the quality of our lives,” says Peter Gillies, the institute’s founding director. “What was missing was an organization that could bring all the pieces together and establish Rutgers as a leader, not only in the scientific but also the cultural determinants of health.”

Indeed, issues like childhood obesity are multifaceted, involving factors from the scientific to the socioeconomic. By their very nature, they require many different perspectives. That’s why interdisciplinary collaboration represents the very foundation of IFNH. Look no further than the building itself for proof of it.



# without obesity look like?

There isn't a director's suite. You won't find any faculty offices. The idea of a department taking ownership over a lab space is unheard of. "We got rid of all that," says Gillies. "You won't find that hierarchy here. Everyone is in the same facility and what's left is people interacting, sharing coffee, talking to each other, and sharing ideas. What happens when you have people from different backgrounds working together in a common space? That's when you form novel research connections you wouldn't have otherwise."

The building, designed by award-winning architectural firm Ballinger, replaces such private spaces and labs with open offices, modular workspaces, and shared labs. What glues it all together is the

commitment among its participants to working together within the institute and also transforming the community outside its walls; though the research begins in the lab, the goal is to apply findings in the local population and to affect real change.

### Healthy Dining

One example of this is the beautiful Harvest IFNH which, to the casual observer, may look like a café. But it's so much more, says Joe Charette (CC'77), executive director of Rutgers Dining Services.

Yes, you'll find some typical café mainstays like brick oven pizza, a commercial wok, a juice and smoothie bar, and a Mongolian grill. But in the center is a vast ingredient bar, where patrons can build a salad or wrap or, uniquely,

choose exactly which ingredients they'd like in their meals and bring them to any station to be cooked or prepared to order. Ingredients are fresh, local, wholesome, and nutritious, and are prepared with "from scratch" techniques that develop flavor without additives. "We don't have a special," says Charette. "The special is what you feel like eating."

Beyond offering nutritious food, Harvest IFNH will also host research and programs for the institute's many academic units. "We will bring the community in on a regular basis, and it's our hope to be able to show people what real food—whole food—tastes like," Charette adds. In the works are collaborations with the Nutritional Sciences Preschool as well as community partner Chop Chop Kids,

*(Continued on page 6)*

Photography by John O'Boyle.

# New Jersey Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health Ribbon Cutting



Founding director Peter Gillies.



Left-Right: President Robert Barchi, Dr. Robin Mockenhaupt, Honorable Kim Guadagno, Dr. Richard Edwards, Dr. Robert Goodman, Dr. Peter Gillies, and Mr. Antonio Calcado.



President Robert Barchi.



Jerry Peel conducting "One Voice" with the Rutgers Brass Ensemble from Mason Gross.



Photography by Nick Romanenko and Jeff Heckman.

## A Living Portrait

It started as a casual curiosity in the Floriculture Greenhouse. Michael Coraggio (SEBS'06) and Ryan Burroughs (GSNB'12) wanted to know how to build a vertical garden and what that garden might need in order to last long-term on site using sustainable practices.

Before long, they had developed a prototype and were able to launch and grow their business, EcoWalls, LLC, with the support of the Rutgers NJAES EcoComplex, a comprehensive business development program and facility for companies in the clean energy, environmental, and controlled environment agriculture industries. That was in 2008.

Today, the pair's EcoWall—a living, vertical garden—is an integral part of the Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health. It not only beautifies the space with a healthy dose of greenery, but it also provides a functional link to the programs housed there by growing plants and purifying the air, all with a sustainable watering system that's 100 percent efficient. In total, the wall comprises more than 6,000 plants representing nearly 80 species. "It's about the connection we have with the natural environment, and the building does a great job of inviting in those natural elements," says Coraggio. "The living wall is an extension of that and it brings the outdoors in."

The EcoWall was grown and assembled at the Rutgers EcoComplex before finding a permanent home in the stairwell of the institute. "This has been a process that we probably won't have the opportunity to experience very frequently, if ever again, at Rutgers," says Coraggio. "We started as students, finished our degrees, started a company, and are now working with Rutgers on the other side. It's been a privilege and an honor."



(Continued from page 4)

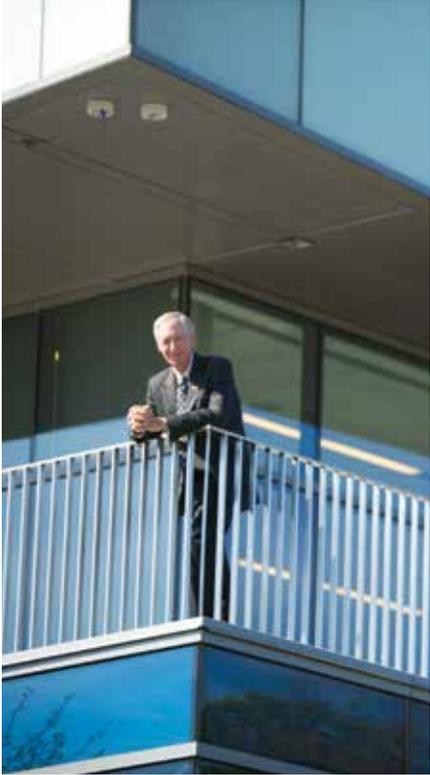
a nonprofit organization with a mission to fight childhood obesity by teaching children how to cook with their families.

Bringing it all together, interdisciplinary success at the institute might look something like this: Children are invited into the Center for Childhood Nutrition Education and Research, where they learn about nutrition and how to cook in an interactive environment. They'll play outside to increase their physical activity, and they'll meet Rutgers student-athletes training in the Center for Health and Human Performance, a full-service facility built to study the physical effects of exercise. They'll have lunch at Harvest, where healthy food choices are available and encouraged. And they'll take what they've learned back to their families and everyday lives, having learned how to lead a healthier lifestyle.

The result? "A little bit of research, a little bit of community work, a little bit of food law—it's many parts coming together to work on a common problem," says Gillies. "The competitive advantage of interdisciplinary research is the creativity engendered by its diversity."

## BUILDING FEATURES

- A state-of-the-art, 145-seat seminar room
- Open modular laboratory with space to accommodate six to eight research groups
- Open office space for 70 faculty and staff, and 30 graduate and undergraduate students
- A 25-seat special events boardroom
- A 45-seat long-distance learning and video conferencing facility
- Fully equipped health and human performance lab
- Student health clinic and nutrition counseling services
- Harvest IFNH eatery and gathering place
- Childhood education and research lab



Founding director Peter Gillies.

## One Nutrition

One Nutrition is an interdisciplinary initiative that emerged from the universitywide strategic planning process, designed to bridge science, policy, the arts, and the New Jersey community. The bridge? IFNH.

Components include the cultural role of food, performance nutrition, the impact of obesity and diabetes, health economics, and more.

"One Nutrition recognizes that, from an academic perspective, the discussion of nutrition is more than the science," says Gillies. "It's also about culture, ethics, and social impact, and how nutrition bears on each of them. So we believe that nutrition should be taught broadly to everyone at the university."



Photography by John O'Boyle.