University gives $50,000 and ‘sweat equity’ to Habitat for Humanity home

Princeton University contributed $50,000 to Habitat for Humanity to help construct a new home in Princeton’s historic Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood.

Kristin Appelget, the University’s director of community and regional affairs, announced the gift at a Habitat for Humanity reception held Oct. 11. “We look forward to working with you to make the dream of home ownership possible for two families,” Appelget said. “Our students, faculty and staff are eager to be part of the ‘sweat equity’ that will ultimately make this dream a reality.”

The contribution will go toward building a duplex on Lytle Street. A groundbreaking ceremony took place on Jan. 24.

“We are excited about ... not only helping the town meet its affordable housing goals, but also bringing the dream of home ownership to these families,” said Lori Leonard, chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity of Burlington County and Greater Trenton-Princeton. “We are extremely grateful for Princeton University’s support of our mission in this great town.”

Appelget noted the engagement that Princeton students, faculty and staff have had with Habitat for Humanity, from volunteering to build homes in Mexico in 2004 to more recent local projects.

“We are excited to build upon these many years of involvement,” Appelget said, congratulating the Habitat board and staff for making this project possible. She also thanked Mayor Liz Lempert and members of the town council for their work with Habitat on this effort, extending special gratitude to Council Member Leticia Fraga for encouraging University support.

Google to open artificial intelligence lab in Princeton and collaborate with University researchers

Two Princeton University computer science professors are leading a new Google AI lab that opened recently in the town of Princeton. The lab is expected to expand New Jersey’s burgeoning innovation ecosystem by building a collaborative effort to advance research in artificial intelligence.

The lab, at 1 Palmer Square, will start with a small number of faculty members, graduate and undergraduate student researchers, recent graduates, and software engineers. It builds on several years of close collaboration between Google and professors Elad Hazan and Yoram Singer, who will split their time working for Google and Princeton.

The work in the lab will focus on a discipline within artificial intelligence known as machine learning, in which computers learn from existing information and develop the ability to draw conclusions and make decisions in new situations that were not in the original data. Examples include speech recognition systems that transcribe a wide spectrum of voices, and self-driving cars that process complex visual cues. In particular, the work will build on recent advances by Hazan, Singer and colleagues in optimization methods for machine learning to improve their speed and accuracy while reducing the required computing power.

“We feel it’s a great opportunity, both for machine learning theorists at Princeton to benefit from exposure to real-world computing problems, and for Google to benefit from long-term, unconstrained academic research that Google may incorporate into future products,” said Singer.

Hazan said Princeton has longstanding strength in the mathematics and theory behind machine learning, optimization and computing in general. “As academics we try to think about theory for solving problems that are, many times, in the abstract, and it’s very helpful for us to be in touch with real-world problems,” he said.

Google recently opened an artificial intelligence laboratory at 1 Palmer Square in Princeton, led by Princeton computer science professors Elad Hazan and Yoram Singer. (Photo by Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications)

save the date

Campus Farmers’ Market

Wednesdays • April 10 - May 8
11 a.m. - 3 p.m. • Firestone Plaza
From the classroom to the community: Español en acción

Princeton University's Department of Spanish and Portuguese offers several courses as part of the Program for Community-Engaged Scholarship (PIERS), including “Spanish in the Community,” “Medical Spanish” and “Spanish for a Medical Mission in Ecuador.” These courses connect service with academic work, giving students the opportunity to participate in meaningful community service experiences beyond campus.

In “Spanish in the Community,” taught by Alberto Bruzos Moro, professor of Spanish and Portuguese, students explore the complexities of the Spanish language in America. To complement their coursework, students take part in community placements that link to what they discuss in class.

“A topic that we often discuss in [class] is bilingualism and the maintenance or loss of Spanish in children who are born in the U.S. or immigrant when they are young,” said Lydia Spencer, a sophomore and prospective Woodrow Wilson major. “My volunteer work involves reading bilingual books to children at Princeton Nursery School.”

Paloma Moscardó-Vallés, a lecturer in Spanish and Portuguese, teaches two courses with community engagement components: “Medical Spanish” and “Spanish for a Medical Mission in Ecuador.”

In “Medical Spanish,” students study health topics germane to Hispanic communities in the Americas, with a focus on learning technical vocabulary useful for conducting medical conversations in Spanish. In the fall, students visited an English as a Second Language course at the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund in Trenton, where they presented in Spanish on how to read nutritional labels and assess the sugar content in popular beverages.

Last spring, Moscardó-Vallés taught a new course, “Spanish for a Medical Mission in Ecuador,” developed to give service-minded students ample time to participate in and reflect on a medical mission.

The course partnered with Conestoga Eye, a Lancaster, Pennsylvania-based ophthalmology office that had an existing relationship with an Ecuadorian clinic and accompanied the group on their trip, which took place over spring break. Bruzos Moro and Moscardó-Vallés emphasized viewing community engagement through coursework as something that is mutually beneficial.

“Community-based learning is not charity, but citizenship,” said Bruzos Moro. “It is about learning the skills and acquiring the knowledge important for all of us in our collective struggle for a more just society.”

‘Migrations’ series continues exploration of peoples, cultures and borders

This spring, Princeton University launches its second year of public programming in the series “Migrations: A Princeton Community Collaboration.”

Through lectures, conferences, performances and panel discussions, the public is invited to learn more about the movement of peoples over time and the consequences of those shifts.

“If migration has been a major human experience throughout history, it is taking on dramatic new dimensions in our own era of globalization,” said Sandra Bermann, the Cotsen Professor in the Humanities and professor of comparative literature. “Our aim is to bring global, national and local migration issues to the forefront.”

Since early 2018, the University has collaborated with more than 30 Princeton-area nonprofit organizations on a range of events that have featured prominent leaders and thinkers including Mexico’s past president, Ernesto Zedillo, and migration historian Isabel Wilkerson.

The programming sprang from a Princeton research initiative that began in 2016 and includes 35 Princeton faculty members across disciplines. Now called the Princeton Migrations Lab, the effort is supported through the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies.

The Historical Society of Princeton, one “Migrations” series partner, opened in 2018 an archive of the many Italian immigrants who settled in Princeton in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

“The ‘Migrations’ project provided an opportunity for us to deep dive on an important, relevant topic,” said Izzy Kasdin, executive director of the Historical Society of Princeton. “Not only did the project provide diverse insights into the significance of migration, it also created valuable partnerships between local organizations. When local organizations work together, the whole community benefits.”

The spring 2019 lineup will spotlight Princeton faculty, journalists and international scholars. Highlights include: panel discussions on March 26 and March 28 on “Migration, Journalism and the Question of Representation,” featuring Princeton student journalists, faculty and reporters from The Washington Post, The New Yorker and NPR; and two talks on “Arts in Migration” on April 2 and 4, followed by an April 6 lecture by faculty from Princeton and the University of Guadalajara, presented in Spanish and English at the Princeton Public Library.

Series events are posted at piirs.princeton.edu/news-events/events/191.
Healthy eating champion Fran McManus co-founded the Princeton School Gardens Cooperative and its Garden State on Your Plate (GSOYP) program, which has been helping Princeton schoolkids to love nutritious, flavorful foods since 2010. We sat down with her to learn how the program’s roots have grown deep and wide across all Princeton public elementary schools.

What inspired you to begin Garden State on Your Plate?

We wanted to expose kids to new fruits and vegetables that they may not experience at home, and to do it in a learning environment. The pilot launched in September 2010 with a $30,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. With that grant, we ran 10 tastings of fresh, local produce items in two schools; each was led by a chef from an area restaurant and a local farmer.

Why is it important to address healthy eating among Princeton schoolchildren?

We also funded field trips to farms to connect kids to foods grown nearby. We wanted them to understand where local produce comes from, why it’s important to our state, and the differences in quality and taste that you get when foods are locally grown.

How has that relationship evolved?

At the elementary school age, children really forge lifelong habits, so that’s the time to catch them and expand their palates. Kids are quite curious about food, so we want to give them opportunities to try new foods for themselves and know how they’re grown.

How has GSOYP grown since it started?

Don’t talk about health with the kids on purpose — that’s the quickest way to lose them. We emphasize flavor and the connections to area farmers and the economy.

Why is it important to introduce healthy eating to Princeton elementary schools?

We don’t talk about health with the kids on purpose — that’s the quickest way to lose them. We emphasize flavor and the connections to area farmers and the economy.

How has GSOYP since the beginning, with the chefs bringing produce samples to each school once a year. Tastings happen over the lunch period, so the chefs are able to engage with every student over a three-hour window. Campus Dining also brings recipe and information cards about the featured produce that the kids can take home.

Over the years, students have tried 22 different New Jersey- and Pennsylvania-grown items including pea tendrils, apples, Swiss chard, garlic, radishes and, most recently, kohlrabi. The chefs introduce the tastings and get the kids engaged … particularly [University Executive Chef] Rick Piancone. He got the kids so excited that the principal came to the cafeteria to see what was going on!

Students try the produce in raw and cooked form so they experience how cooking transforms food taste and texture. We also give them salt and citrus seasonings so they are empowered to make the produce taste the way they like. They often are surprised by how something simple like salt can help bring the flavor out.

Before GSYOP, kids might make a blanket statement that they don’t like beets, but with the exposure that the tastings provide, they can say, for example, they like them raw but not cooked.

What impact has the program had on the schools, students and the community?

We hear from parents that their children come home and ask for beets or chard for dinner. Even among picky eaters, it’s impossible the power that lies in trying new things with their peers. GSOYP has opened their kids’ minds to fresh, healthy foods when little that families have tried at home has worked.

The school district has been very supportive, and we’re thinking with school leaders about how else we could extend our impact. Ideally, when kids sit down to a tasting, they already will have been exposed to the produce in the school garden and through the classroom curriculum.

What’s the most unexpected or fun thing you’ve encountered?

At an early tasting, the former principal at Community Park came up to the prep table, and we asked her if she’d like to try the beets. She replied, “I don’t like beets.” And we said, “Well, all of your students are watching you, so you sort of have to try them.” She reluctantly tasted them and found she really liked them! She couldn’t understand how she had formed this lifelong opinion as a child that beets were to be avoided.

So that right there proved our point about the impact of early tastings. It was a real epiphany for her about the importance of the school garden and the tasting program being part of school lunch.

What excites you about the future of this initiative?

Food science is back in the middle school curriculum. This fall, the food science students helped prepare our kohlrabi samples for the elementary schools, and for their own classmates. Witherspoon students now can learn the science behind what we exposed them to in the elementary schools, such as the changes that happen during cooking, and the effect of seasoning on flavor. To see these efforts expand and be woven into the academic curriculum is really exciting.
Hot topics for cold winter days: Science on Saturday captivates audiences

The Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory’s (PPPL) 2019 Ronald E. Hatcher Science on Saturday Lecture Series covers hot science topics that stimulate the minds of science fans of all ages.

Upcoming highlights of the program, held at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) national laboratory operated by Princeton University, include a talk on New Jersey’s changing climate by David Robinson, New Jersey’s climatologist, on Feb. 2. On Feb. 16, PPPL physicist Fatima Ebrahimji will speak on “Magnetic Explosions: From Space Plasmas to Fusion Energy.” Interested in plants? You will want to hear Ying Reinfelder of Rutgers University on “How Deep Are Plant Roots?” on March 16.

“I am proud that PPPL is once again offering this program, which is so cherished by the community,” said Andrew Zwicker, PPPL, head of communications and public outreach, who hosts the program. “We have a wonderful lineup of speakers this year and I hope young and old alike will join us.”

The lecture series has proven beneficial to a multifaceted audience, and among them: Laura Celik, teacher at Princeton Charter School (PCS). “Attending one Science on Saturday session is an opportunity for students to deeply examine a specific topic, led by an expert,” Celik said. “Attending multiple sessions allows students to explore the broad range of work done by scientists and engineers, and to consider possible fields to pursue in the future.”

A 2018 graduate of PCS, Kirsty Graham, said: “Science on Saturday was very much a part of my family’s Saturday routine. We attended every one for three years in a row. I realize, I draw on information I gained from these lectures. It’s my dream to give my own Science on Saturday lecture.”

Google AI lab

continued from front page

“Computing started at Princeton more than 80 years ago when alumnus Alan Turing first introduced a theory for how machines could calculate,” said Emily Carter, dean of the School of Engineering and Applied Science. “This collaboration is another excellent example of how fundamental insights in mathematics and theoretical computer science drive new technologies with benefits far beyond the original domain of the work.”

Jennifer Rexford, chair of the Department of Computer Science, said the new venture comes at a time of significant growth in computer science and related areas of data science at Princeton. “The work with Google will complement all three pillars of excellence that make data science at Princeton strong today: a foundation in the theory and math behind computing; collaborations that are accelerating discovery across fields such as genomics, neuroscience, chemistry, psychology and sociology; and leadership, through our Center for Information Technology Policy, in the broader societal implications of computing such as bias and ethics in AI, privacy and security,” Rexford said.

“It is an exciting opportunity to work with a leading company while also maintaining the strong academic independence and freedom that is essential to Princeton,” Rexford added.

The decision to open a lab in Princeton reflects Google’s longstanding openness to collaborating with academic researchers, supporting the open-source community and publishing results in peer-reviewed outlets, said Andrew Pierso, a Google program manager. On a practical level, Google’s enormous computing resources give researchers the ability to run experiments that would otherwise be difficult as they optimize algorithms that deal with millions of variables and perform trillions of calculations, he said.

But a bottom-line motivation for collaborating with Princeton, said Amy McDonald Sandeide, a technical program manager at Google, is talent. Because the community of artificial intelligence researchers is small, she said, continued progress requires new sources of inspiration and collaboration.

“With the large scale of computing resources and access to the best minds available to the University, we are creating opportunities for our researchers that simply wouldn’t exist in any other setting,” she said. “We are able to run experiments in ways never before thought possible.”

transit tracks

Princeton University works closely with local transportation officials to provide various ways for people to get to and from campus, and around the region, conveniently and affordably. Visit princetontransit.transloc.com to get real-time bus status and arrival times for all TigerTransit and FreeB routes, and to download the Transloc mobile app for your phone.

TigerTransit — Princeton University’s TigerTransit bus system provides convenient and reliable transportation throughout the Princeton campus and surrounding community. Residents depend on TigerTransit, for example, to ride from Palmer Square to the Penn-Princeton Medical Center on Route 1. The TigerTransit system is free and open to the public.

transportation.princeton.edu/options/tigertransit

FreeB — The University helped support the launch of the freeB shuttle bus in 2008 and funded a new bus purchase in 2016. The freeB offers free rides throughout town, stopping at key locations including the Princeton Public Library, Princeton Shopping Center and the Dinky station.

www.princeton.edu/guide/getting-around-princeton

Zagster bike share — The town and University welcomed Zagster bikeshare in early 2016. Interested users can pay one-time $20 fee, and through a smartphone app, rent a bike from any of the locations throughout town, including the Dinky station, Alexander Hall and the Princeton Shopping Center. bike.zagster.com/princeton

Office of Community and Regional Affairs
4 Mercer Street - Princeton, NJ 08540
609-258-3204
purra@princeton.edu - community.princeton.edu
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