

# Meet Lancaster's New Extension Home Economist



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—“How do I remove coffee stains from a tablecloth?”

“How do I get the most efficient use from my freezer?”

These were questions callers posed to Nancy Wiker during her first day on the job as the newly-appointed home economist for Penn State Cooperative Extension at the Lancaster County office.

“I’m really excited about this job. It’s been my long-term goal for years and this is just the right timing for me,” Wiker said.

She left behind her 24-year tenure as a teacher of home-economic related courses at the county’s Pequea Valley High School to assume her new position.

The hours of a teaching job seemed more conducive to raising a family, but now that she and her husband Bob’s children, Dana, 7; Justin, 12; and Ross, 19, are older, Wiker considers the job opening as the right timing for her.

Wiker grew up in Susquehanna County. “My parents and grandparents were very family oriented and served as healthy role models to me,” Wiker said of the cooking and sewing skills she acquired during her growing up years.

Their influence caused her to study individual and family studies at Penn State and attain a teaching certificate and later a master’s of education degree.

Over the years, Wiker has participated in the change of focus in home economic courses mandated for high school students.

“I’ve taught it all,” Wiker said of the food, clothing, and textile emphasis that has now switched to home management, housing, consumerism, and child development courses.

Wiker believes her background has provided her with a multi-faceted background for the many

Nancy Wiker is the newly-appointed home economist for Lancaster County’s Penn State Cooperative Extension. After teaching home economic-related courses for 24 years at Pequea Valley High School, Wiker has achieved her long-standing goal to become associated with extension services.

responsibilities she faces in her job as the county home economist.

“Having lived in the county for 25 years, I already have many established contacts through my work with school field trips and guest speakers,” she said.

As a former summer assistant in the Susquehanna County Extension office, Wiker had a good grasp on the many services that the extension provides, but even she is surprised by the scope of its services now that she is actually in a full-time position with the extension.

“The extension is one of the best kept secrets,” she said of the public’s unfamiliarity with all the services offered.

She is in the process of determining how to best make the extension’s resources known to the community and serve its needs.

While her exact program is not in place at this time, Wiker foresees a food and nutrition focus. She said, “I plan to help people see how to fit healthy eating into everyday lifestyles.”

This will include offering workshops to all economical levels.

Wiker is not alone in determining the services that should be offered to the community. In addition to her mentor, Lettie Schadler, extension director for Lebanon County, Wiker will be guided by an advisory council made up of about 20 persons, most who hold office on other community service

boards.

Wiker will be participating in writing the column “Family Living Focus,” which appears in this paper, and in local radio programming related to consumerism.

Regarding all those questions that callers pose, Wiker said that if she doesn’t know the answers, she has plenty of resources. In addition to reference books and electronic sources, Wiker has direct access to Penn State personnel.

“If I don’t know the answer immediately, I promise to find out and call back,” Wiker said.

Unlike her job as a schoolteacher, Wiker said it will be more difficult to determine how clients use the information the extension offers. She won’t see many of the people helped through extension services on a regular basis. But, she knows that the people she teaches will attend workshops and ask for help because they want it rather than being required to participate.

“The change in career is exciting to me. I had used extension resources before and now to become part of serving the community is a wonderful opportunity,” she said.



Wiker plans to help people see how to fit healthy eating into everyday lifestyles by offering food and nutrition programs at the Farm and Home Center.



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