



JOANNE CLOUGHLY

Real Life. Real Learning. Real Food.

A baguette changed JoAnne Cloughly's life. "My Aunt Jeanette took me under her wing when I was a teenager and taught me how to bake French bread. That focused my life. She was my Alice Waters or Julia Child. Everything she did was so beautiful, like pulling stupendous flavors out of a simple salad."

A certified executive pastry chef, Cloughly now serves as chair of SUNY Cobleskill's Agricultural Business and Food Management program. Cloughly and I met on campus over freshly baked apple cake and coffee, and she shared her insights as Cobleskill wraps up its centennial year. In one afternoon visit, it became apparent that the college truly lives up to its motto, "Real Life. Real Learning." These kids are dedicated. Just like their enthusiastic leader.

Edible Capital District: What distinguishes SUNY Cobleskill from other culinary programs?

JoAnne Cloughly: It's the crossover among programs. Under the umbrella of the Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources, established in 2014, ag students learn about cooking, and culinary kids see how food is being grown. Before, ag students would learn how to process and cut meat. Now, one of our culinary instructors co-teaches in the meat lab, and he brings the ag students to the kitchen and shows them how to properly season and cook the various cuts. They discuss taste and texture so they're learning the whole spectrum.

I want our students to learn how the quality of ingredients affects the preparation and final product. Food isn't delivered to our kitchens in frozen packages or on Styrofoam trays. It comes from the pastures and gardens across the road. And those same high-quality homegrown ingredients are prepared by culinary students, served in the campus restaurant and consumed—gratefully—by their peers and guests.

ECD: So the community is immersed in farm-to-table.

JC: Absolutely. The farm crew will grow and harvest whatever we request. Hydroponically, we also grow strawberries, tomatoes, English cucumbers, buttery soft lettuce heads, baby greens. Our aquaculture facility, the largest cold water fish hatchery in the Northeast, raises gorgeous trout, arctic char and tilapia. We're the only SUNY school with a USDA meat processing facility. Students learn the realities of planning, planting, raising, harvesting and preparing food grown right here on their own college farm.

ECD: And those popular benefit dinners?

JC: Our culinary department offers farm-to-table dinners open to the public. They fill up quick! We generally serve 30 to 40 people at

each event held in the Rolling Hills Bistro, our campus restaurant. For \$25, you get an all-inclusive meal. Students develop the menu, prepare and serve all the food. In October, we host our annual Culinary Extravaganza to benefit the culinary scholarship fund. About 300 people attend, and for \$50, they enjoy a luxurious meal centered on the bounty of the Schoharie Valley and Cobleskill's farm.

ECD: How did you end up at Cobleskill?

JC: I grew up in New Jersey and my parents had a home in Otsego county. I moved up here from New York City in 1985 and never looked back. I started as an adjunct professor in 1998 then became a lab assistant and ultimately worked my way up to full professor. In 2013, I was tapped to serve as department chair.

ECD: I understand you were inducted into the esteemed Les Dames d'Escoffier in 2015. What does that honor entail?

JC: Les Dames d'Escoffier is a philanthropic worldwide organization of women in the food industry, from chefs and food writers to vintners, educators and hoteliers. Lidia Bastianich and Carol Brock, the organization's founder, sponsored me through the process. It's all about mentoring, collaborating and educating not only current members but also reaching out to foster the rising stars. It's basically women working together on educational programs, generating mentorships and scholarships, learning from and helping each other. It's inspirational to stretch to new levels and it just reminds me how much more I could be doing!

ECD: What was your first professional cooking experience?

JC: In the mid-1980s, I was working as a waitress at the Otesaga Hotel, a five-star resort in Cooperstown. Charlie Raymor, the executive chef, noticed my work ethic and passion for food and encouraged me to work in the kitchen. He kind of hijacked me. I went into the bakery and never left. He picked up where Aunt Jeanette left off, teaching me the craft of pastry and bread.

ECD: Who are some other mentors?

JC: Ric Orlando of New World Home Cooking in Saugerties—he's my go-to guy if I need to get my mojo going. Dan Leader at Bread Alone. The food scientist Shirley Corriher is a wealth of knowledge. I love Anthony Bourdain, Michael Pollan, Alton Brown. And Ann Cooper, aka "The Lunch Lady," works to revamp school lunch programs with healthy, tasty food. I won a scholarship to work with her



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at the Ross School on Long Island. She's a friend now and a phenomenal chef.

ECD: Tell me about New York Farm Day.

JC: When Hillary Clinton was a senator, she wanted to showcase New York's farms, wineries and producers, so she created this event held in Washington each September. Kirsten Gilibrand has continued the tradition. It's a day where producers and farmers get the chance to meet politicians and lobbyists. There's a huge reception that night with tastings of New York's finest. SUNY Cobleskill has been invited each year, which allows us to highlight the campus and Schoharie Valley. We plan for a month, creating recipes that feature area products. We invite two students to help prepare and serve the food at the tasting. The kids get to interact with politicians and the press and take pride in what they have created. They're our best spokespeople for sure!

ECD: But even a diehard like you needs to unwind.

JC: True! After a day at school, it's always fun to come home and get dirty! My house was gutted this past summer so I could stay outside and focus on my gardens and flower beds and clean up a pond on the property. I also spend a lot of time on my Harley on weekends, taking day trips in the area and up through the Adirondacks. I got tired of being a passenger on everyone else's bike so I bought one of my own. Being on my motorcycle is a big stress reliever!

ECD: What keeps you inspired as a teacher?

JC: Seeing my students evolve over the years. It's so much more than just cooking. I love working with the kids through the rough days, their green days, and watching them progress and become confident professionals. This is the most rewarding job I've ever had.

ECD: Lessons learned from a career in kitchens and classrooms?

JC: If you're not having fun, you won't learn. I treat all my students and peers with compassion and respect. I've learned to be patient, and that calm yields better results in the long run. Mistakes won't kill you—they're just opportunities for improvement. 🍴

RAPID FIRE QUESTIONS

Edible Capital District: Breakfast today?

JC: Pineapple, cottage cheese, coffee

ECD: Favorite childhood meal?

JC: Spaghetti and meatballs

ECD: Cake, pie or cookies?

JC: Chocolate chip cookies with walnuts and raisins

ECD: Guilty pleasure?

JC: Ice cream or sugary desserts

ECD: Late-night snack?

JC: Chocolate milk