

Knight Fellow works to stir interest in the environment

How appropriate that this year's Knight Fellowship established two firsts: Not only is Lillian Kuri '88 the first alumna to serve as Reserve's Knight Fellow, she's also the first to tackle the very relevant issue of environmental sustainability.

For Kuri, currently the director of special projects at the Cleveland Foundation, the trip to Reserve for her Jan. 28-30 Knight Fellowship took less than an hour. But it was a trip that was 20 years in the making.

"It's really special to come back, as an alumna, and put myself in the kids' place and ask 'what would I want to hear,'" said Kuri, whose Knight Fellowship topic was *Rethinking the Role of American Cities*. "In some ways, it feels very familiar to be back – a lot hasn't changed, but a lot has, in a good way."

During the 20 years between her graduation and her 2008 Knight Fellowship, Kuri has been busy, indeed. A licensed architect, she received her undergraduate degree at Kent State before earning a master's degree in urban design at Harvard. She's also a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design accredited professional. Today, the group's Green Building Rating System is a benchmark for the design, construction and operation of green buildings across the U.S. Before returning to the Cleveland area, Kuri had a hand in the redevelopment of Boston's City Hall Plaza, as well as an initiative to rebuild downtown Beirut, Lebanon – a project, she says, that changed her life.

As executive director of Cleveland Public Art for four years, Kuri oversaw the creation of unique public spaces in the city's urban landscape. Now, at the Cleveland Foundation, she manages the Greater University Circle Initiative: *Creating Cleveland's New 21st Century Community*. The foundation, dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in greater Cleveland, is the oldest and second-largest community foundation in the U.S. Kuri also serves as an appointed member of Cleveland's Planning Commission and as a board member of Cleveland Development Advisors.

Before her first lecture, Kuri was introduced to the Reserve community by history teacher Sarah Horgan. "Ms. Kuri and I go way back," Horgan



Lillian Kuri '88, the first alumna chosen as Knight Fellow, talked to students about *Rethinking the Role of American Cities*.

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recalled, adding that both had come to Reserve at roughly the same time – Horgan as a teacher and Kuri a student. Horgan went on to describe Kuri, the Reserve student, as confident, sharp, witty, fiercely competitive and fun. And although Kuri was not one of the top students in her graduating class, Horgan reflected, “There was something quite remarkable about Lillian. I knew that she would go out and make changes in the world – I expected great things from her. And my intuition was correct – she has done just that. And it’s quite exciting.”

In her lectures, Kuri’s enthusiasm for her work was obvious. She challenged students to think differently – and creatively – about their environments. “We actually have a choice,” she said, building the case for urban sustainability, and providing insight into the many ways that the city of Cleveland is moving toward a more sustainable environment. “The train has left the station on green building.”

Kuri’s hope, she said, was that her presentations would inspire students. “I believe that the future of this region, and the future of this country, lies in the brilliance, optimism and ingenuity of your generation,” she told students. “My goal is simple: to capture a few of you to take on this issue – as a career or as an interest. The future of this country is the green economy. That is the world you live in.

“Businesses,” she added, “are getting really creative, and there’s a lot of money to be made. It will be market-driven from here on out, not just a few crazy environmentalists.”

As Knight Fellow, Kuri had an easy time relating to students. In addition to her three all-school lectures, she visited several classes – everything from A.P. Art History and English to U.S. History and Spanish, and, of course, architecture. She also fielded plenty of questions from students one-on-one, taking the time to listen and respond thoughtfully, whether the topic was her experiences as a Reserve student or her plans to build a “LEED Gold” house for her family.

“I’ve been impressed with the quality of the students,” Kuri said. “The interaction has been great; they’ve asked really informed questions.” She was also pleased to see that classes like environmental biology – “topics that weren’t even on the radar screen in my day” – are now part of Reserve’s curriculum. “The most amazing thing is how engaged and engaging the students are.”

Science Department faculty member Justin Zimmerman invited Kuri to sit in on his environmental biology class, and the conversation was lively. “Lillian is on the front lines, working on developing sustainable communities within Cleveland, and my students got to hear about the challenges that



Knight Fellow Lillian Kuri '88 meets with members of Sarah Horgan's U.S. History class.

she faces day to day,” Zimmerman reflected. “She has been fighting an uphill battle that is just now beginning to gain real momentum within Cleveland and the nation. It is inspiring to hear about all the promising projects and how devoted she has become to the environment.”

For Mikael Owunna '08, Kuri’s visit couldn’t have come at a better time. Owunna is in the process of writing his Senior Seminar thesis paper, and he found Kuri to be an excellent resource. “The focus of my research is on the inherent unsustainability of our current conception of the American dream as low-density suburban living,” he explained. “Her experiences with designing sustainable urban environments gave an applicable ‘real world’ context for my argument as well.”

For Elena Fox '08, Kuri’s Knight Fellowship was also timely. “It was really interesting to me,” said Fox, “because I want to major in environmental studies in college and hopefully get into environmental law. It was really inspiring to hear someone who graduated from WRA, who went off to college, and then found herself back home with a successful career.”

Gina Na '09 appreciated Kuri’s deeply rooted interest in the Re-

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serve community. “As an alumna, Ms. Kuri seemed to be very interested in the changes at Reserve. She loved how diverse Reserve has become.” That focus on diversity and inclusiveness, Na added, was also readily apparent in Kuri’s discussion of environmental issues. “My conversation with her made me think about how a town actually affects the people living there, and I really am interested to see the development and changes taking place in Cleveland.”

Sarah Foster ’10 said, “I thought it was good to have a local speaker, because it was much easier to connect to the places and events she was talking about. And it is very important to stir up interest in these environmental issues among young people, because our generation, as Kuri pointed out, will soon be entering the search for and implementation of alternative energy resources.”

For Tae-Heon Jeong ’09, Kuri’s visit helped bring college and career goals into focus. “I believe this was a very meaningful experience, especially for me, since I want to study engineering in college,” he said. “Until now, I did not know specifically what kind of engineering I was interested in, but through this experience, I was able to learn more about construction engineering, and about how structures can affect cities in so many ways. Perhaps city designing is something I would like to do in my future.”

Owunna spoke for many when he summed up Kuri’s visit this way: “Ms. Kuri’s work is the wave of the future, so her selection as Knight Fellow was quite apt.”

Zimmerman concluded, “As Kuri said to the students, the future is really in their hands, and she urged them to go on and become engineers if they are interested in what she does.” Some Reserve students, however, had a more immediate reaction. “Her talks energized some students so much that I think they will be actively pushing environmentally minded projects on campus very soon!”

What does Kuri hope her Knight Fellowship accomplished? “I hope I have sparked students’ interest in a range of topics,” she said. “I hope some might consider careers or courses of study in college that they hadn’t thought of before.” Perhaps even more important, she reflects, is that she conveyed to the Reserve community a passion for what she does. “I hope students will find their own passions – find a job that doesn’t feel like work.”

If Kuri has her way, her Knight Fellowship dialogue will continue. “I do hope some of these students feel comfortable connecting with me in the future,” she added. “I could be a resource for them.”



The mystery of the Reserve pennant at Le Select Bar in Gustavia, St. Barths, has been solved. Headmaster Henry Flanagan reports that several years ago he and Britt took several students on a sailing trip in the French West Indies. While in Gustavia, they went in search of Jimmy Buffett’s famed “cheeseburger in paradise” – found it at Le Select Bar – and left the pennant behind. Special thanks to Tom Hatch, parent of Josh ’91, who confirmed the story. Rudolph Garfield ’46 checked in to say a pennant also hangs in Maya’s, another bar in St. Barths owned by Maya and Randy Gurley, parents of Nic ’02. Finally, Tierney Kimmerle, parent of Will ’06, K.K. ’07 and Richard ’11, said her family has left Reserve pennants in several places when they have taken family vacations over the years.