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**SPECIAL BACK TO COLLEGE ISSUE**

# Calling Doctor Fix-It



Newsday Photo/Audrey C. Tiernan

## ► Big Man On Campus

This is the man Adelphi has hired to set the battered university on the road to recovery. If he does his job right, you'll never remember his name.

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## ► Vital Signs

In this edition, meet Howard Stern's favorite tattoo artist, visit a whimsical front yard and see what you can create with tin cans.

## ► Many Memories

A few weeks ago, we asked readers to send in their garden memories. And the response has been just grand. Here are a few we can all share.



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Newsday Photo/John Keating

**Adelphi President Dolph Norton and his wife Fay-Tyler outside their Garden City home.**

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## Big Man on Campus

**Dolph Norton has made a second career out of helping troubled schools get back on track. Now it's Adelphi's turn.**

By Matthew Cox  
Staff Writer

**S**HE KEEPS the four photocopied pages in a file cabinet at home in Charlottesville, Va. And when the call came from Adelphi University in March, Fay-Tyler Norton pulled them out again.

Acquired long ago when she was renting out was she a tenant? Renting out sounds like she was landlord...just renting?/cmg a house in South Carolina, the pages list household items that make living in a furnished apartment less like inhabiting a hotel suite. Things such as a cheese grater. Guest towels. Those lidded plastic containers for saving leftovers.

This was the fifth time in nine years that Fay-Tyler's husband, James Adolphus Norton, had been called out of retirement to serve as the interim leader of a struggling college or university. The couple had recently returned from Maine, where they took care of their 50-year-old daughter, Diana, until her death in January from breast cancer.

"I remember thinking, 'Now we'll settle in,'" said Fay-Tyler, a slender, fine-haired woman with a broad smile.

Instead, the telephone rang, and the couple was headed to Long Island, a place they knew only from stopovers at Kennedy Airport. She faxed the list of household items to Adelphi. And she began packing for another move.

Her 75-year-old husband, whom everyone calls Dolph, does for troubled universities what emergency medical technicians do for accident victims -- he stops the bleeding, checks vital signs and generally stabilizes things until permanent help arrives. Since April, his patient has been Adelphi, the 101-year-old liberal-arts school in Garden City that had gained national attention over the previous 18 months because of the extravagant pay and controversial governing style of its former president, Peter Diamandopoulos.

"If there's one man in the United States who could begin to heal what has happened at Adelphi and put it back on the road to stability, I would say it's Dolph Norton," said Ronald Machtley, the former Rhode

Island congressman who took over at Norton's last post, Bryant College in that state, when Norton finished his eight-month interim presidency in July, 1996.

Norton knows he wouldn't be here if things were going smoothly at Adelphi, which is Long Island's oldest college, chartered in 1896 in Brooklyn and located in Garden City since 1929. "Any time a college or university needs to step outside of itself for an interim presidency, you know it has troubles," he said. But when he looks at Adelphi, he sees a glass that's half full. "I cannot believe that this is not a time for Adelphi to say, 'We're buying in at a low point, but we've got blue skies ahead.' That doesn't mean it's not going to be troublesome. I'm not saying that."

Unassuming and far from flashy in his personal style, Norton seems well suited to his job. His mission, after all, is not to leave his own imprint on the university, but to set things up for a successor. And although he revealed few of his personal motivations during a recent two-hour interview, Norton freely discussed the job's limitations.

"You know the biggest frustration? It's recognizing that you can't set the tone of the place, because you've got to turn it over to a successor in a short time," he said. As an example, he cited his enthusiasm over an effort by the deans of Adelphi's schools of social work, education, nursing and business to put together an interdisciplinary program to prepare students for work in the modern health-care industry. "I would like to see this one really take off," he said, "and I'd like to have my fingers in it all the way."

And he knows that won't be possible.

Adelphi may prove to be Norton's toughest challenge yet. In February, following hearings prompted by faculty complaints, the state Board of Regents dismissed all but one of Adelphi's 19 trustees, saying they had neglected their fiduciary responsibilities by, among other things, dramatically raising Diamandopoulos' salary with only cursory oversight and turning a "blind eye" to his hefty expense accounts. A new board of trustees appointed by the Regents fired Diamandopoulos, then announced it would begin a nationwide search for a permanent president. Norton, one of several candidates recommended by a consulting firm, agreed to serve as interim president through the end of the calendar year at a salary of \$195,000, and then to stay on month-to-month until a permanent leader is hired.

"Provided it's not too long," Norton said during a recent interview in the president's office, his interim status underscored by the bare bookcases behind him.

Coming to Adelphi meant giving up trips he and his wife had planned to the Volga River in Russia and to England, Scotland and Wales. At a time of life when many couples sit back and relax, or travel, or enjoy having no appointments to keep, the Nortons chose to move to an unfamiliar house on a strange campus, in an area of the country they knew little about, realizing a wary university community would be watching their every move.

SO WHY DID he accept the job? Why has he accepted a string of such jobs?

"I have plenty of energy, and I don't know anything more exciting than working in higher education. And as long as that's the case, you enjoy your role," Norton said, speaking in the calm, measured voice that is one reason he is good at what he does. "It's just fun. It is," he insisted, reacting to a reporter's skepticism. "We have enjoyed every one of these assignments tremendously. We've met a lot of nice people. We've met some others, too. But you do that any time."

A tall, gracious man who is incisive and to the point with colleagues, Norton could hardly be more unlike his predecessor, who stands at least a head shorter and was known to break into loquacious soliloquies on a wide range of subjects. Diamandopoulos collected expensive art, kept the door to his office suite locked and was generally viewed as inaccessible. Norton displays faculty art on the office walls, welcomes visitors, and before 8 a.m. often answers the telephone himself.

"I call him the Jimmy Stewart of Adelphi," said Devin Thornburg, chairman of the faculty senate and a cofounder of the Committee to Save Adelphi, which led the fight to oust Diamandopoulos. "He's got that southern demeanor, that avuncular twinkle in his eye."

Norton grew up in Haynesville, La., a town of 2,854 in rural Claiborne Parish, about four miles from the Arkansas border. It's an area known for its oil wells and timber industry. Norton's father, George T. Norton, owned a hardware store and ran four local funeral homes. His mother was a homemaker. He had one sibling, a younger sister named Maurine who now lives in Germany.

In high school, Norton was president of his class and a member of the debate team. He also was an amateur ham radio operator. George Allen, nine years older than Norton and still living in Haynesville, remembers his friend as a tall, slender boy who wore glasses and briefly considered becoming partners with him in a casket factory or funeral home. "We talked about it, but he was professor-minded," Allen said. "He had ambitions." Dolph's father was the only merchant in Haynesville in the 1930s who allowed black customers to use the store's toilets, Allen recalled.

After high school, Norton attended Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in Ruston (now Louisiana Tech University), where his membership on the debating team entitled him to free room, board and laundry. When the United States entered World War II, he left school and enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Poor eyesight kept him from going overseas, but his ham radio skills helped him get a job as a radio operator stationed in Texas, Utah and California. After the war he obtained undergraduate and master's degrees from Louisiana State University, where he met music student Fay-Tyler Murray. They eloped in 1945.

Norton obtained a second master's degree and a PhD in government from Harvard. His first teaching job was at Florida State University, where his wife got her doctoral degree in psychology. The couple

moved to Cleveland in the late 1950s when Norton got a job as a professor at Western Reserve University. During the turbulent 1960s he became president of the Greater Cleveland Associated Foundation, a philanthropic group that tackled urban problems.

"Those were the most exciting years of my life," he recalled. "One thing about the 1960s -- people thought they could improve the world. Nowadays very few people believe that." From 1973 to 1978 he was chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, a job that involved oversight of more than 120 public and private colleges and universities. His wife was a college professor and a dean. Finally, after taking jobs at Case Western University and Cleveland State University, Norton became a professor of government at the University of Virginia.

He retired, for the first time, in 1988. This March -- nine years and four assignments later -- a new group of Adelphi trustees who were trying to find their own sense of direction called on him to help the university prepare for a new era. And everyone at Adelphi knows what's at stake.

On a recent summer evening, three wild rabbits sat chewing grass in front of Anna E. Harvey Hall. A squirrel scampered on the branches of a towering tree. Adelphi's campus, with its brick buildings, slate roofs and neatly trimmed hedgerows, projects a sense of stability that belies the university's recently turbulent past. In the past decade, Adelphi has seen its enrollment drop by more than 50 percent, with especially steep declines in the past two years. Two of the five campus dormitories are unoccupied. Enrollment is projected to drop by as much as 12 percent this fall, from 4,200 full-time equivalent students to somewhere above 3,700 -- a decline that is especially threatening because Adelphi, which has a small endowment, depends on tuition income.

School officials attribute the decline to 18 months of open warfare between the faculty and Diamandopoulos, and to the former president's largely unsuccessful effort to transform the school from a well-rounded university with strong professional-degree programs to an elite college less concerned with preparing students for specific career tracks.

Norton, who wears a hearing aid, put it to good use as soon as he arrived at Adelphi in April.

Listening to the school's new trustees, he learned they were worried about the balance sheet. "They wanted to know if this place could get back on track, and that meant could it survive financially," he said. "Well, it turns out that was an easy one. We had reserves that can carry us through very substantial times of trouble." Excluding about \$9 million in restricted endowment funds, Adelphi's cash reserves total about \$43 million. This school year, projecting an almost \$74 million annual operating budget, Adelphi will dip into those reserves to begin rebuilding some of the programs that have sustained deep funding cuts in recent years, including nursing and education.

"The institution up until this year had been operating by cutting back on programs, faculty and administration, and it had gotten to the point that there were some programs that were undernourished, very

seriously undernourished," Norton said, adding that the school may have to invade cash reserves next year, too.

**L**ISTENING TO faculty, he learned about their hostility toward some administrators. The 18-month effort to oust Diamandopoulos had been led by a faculty committee, and some professors were angry that the former president's top aides, including vice president Igor Webb, were not fired with him. One well-placed Adelphi employee who did not want to be identified said that before Norton's arrival more than one on-campus encounter between a faculty member and an administrator nearly ended in physical blows. "This went on for more than a month," the employee said.

Webb, who also held the title of acting provost, ultimately agreed to leave Adelphi. So did Harvey Wiener, the vice provost. "They recognized that they'd done all they could do," Norton said, declining to elaborate. Norton named history professor Armstrong Starkey provost, who in turn appointed Gayle Insler, a biology professor who was co-chairwoman of the Committee to Save Adelphi, the new dean of the college of arts and sciences.

Starkey's name had come up when Norton asked faculty leaders who they wanted to see in a key administrative post.

Part of Norton's appeal to the trustees who hired him was his ability and willingness to listen. And another part of his appeal was his experience.

Adelphi is the fifth place Norton has served as a temporary leader. He also has been interim president of Hiram College in Hiram, Ohio; interim chancellor of the University of Maryland system; interim chancellor of Lamar University system in Texas, now part of Texas State University; and interim president of Bryant College in Smithfield, R.I.

His first interim presidency began shortly after his retirement in 1988. Norton was a trustee at Hiram College, and when that school's president "moved precipitously," Hiram wondered if he would serve as interim president until a permanent replacement could be found. Norton did, for a year.

All his interim positions have been, by sheer definition, short term. The longest, at Lamar, lasted 21 months; the shortest, at Bryant, was barely eight months. But despite the brevity of each of his tenures, Norton managed to make meaningful changes and leave positive impressions on campuses that were going through painful, often tumultuous adjustments.

The 120,000-student Maryland system, for example, had recently merged two formerly independent state systems when Norton arrived in September, 1989. As interim chancellor, he halved the number of central-office workers and helped smooth ruffled feathers on the 11 campuses and four research centers.

"You had the enormous task of merging these two cultures," said John

Lippincott, associate vice chancellor for advancement. "I'm talking about everything from policies and procedures to just the ways in which all of the leaders were used to interacting with one another. So Dolph did have a big job to do in trying to create some unified culture throughout the system."

Although Norton has never met his predecessor at Adelphi, it's possible he will this fall. Diamandopoulos has expressed an interest in exercising his option to teach at Adelphi, and the provost's office has assigned him two philosophy classes at the university's Manhattan and Huntington campuses -- interestingly, the places most associated with the professional programs Diamandopoulos held in such low regard. It was not clear earlier this month if Diamandopoulos would accept the assignments.

Just about everyone at Adelphi agrees on one thing: The school needs to stop the hemorrhaging enrollment. Adelphi is continuing efforts to reach out to students and guidance counselors at Long Island high schools. And Norton has gotten faculty and administrators to work together on four task forces that will help chart the university's future in the areas of admissions and recruitment, student financial aid, student services and curriculum.

"He has managed almost single-handedly to heal some very deep wounds between faculty and administration," said Thornburg, the faculty senate chairman. Added Insler: "He has made a world of difference in the last few months here. I have been at Adelphi for twenty years and this is the most exciting time I can remember in the life of this university."

Two incoming freshmen are optimistic, too. Suzanne Norcia, 17, said friends who attend Adelphi have told her the controversy over Diamandopoulos had no effect on their education. And during a visit this summer, when she met her new art professors, she found further reassurance. "It all seemed the teachers were kind of happy about the changes going on," said the Franklin Square resident, who plans to live at home and commute. "They were optimistic about things."

Walter Magnuson, 18, also of Franklin Square, said the students he talked to told him the school's troubles "didn't really change things inside the actual classroom ... They said it didn't affect the students in any way, that if they hadn't seen the news they wouldn't even know it was happening," he said.

That's the kind of message the school will be trying to get out in the months ahead. And if all goes well, even his admirers at Adelphi hope that by this time next year Dolph Norton will be gone -- touring Britain, traveling down the Volga River, or perhaps unpacking his clothes at one more unfamiliar campus.

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