

“George is a longtime and effective champion of the University. At this time of deep challenges and great opportunities, he is the right person to advance the educational, research and economic innovation agendas of UAlbany, the NanoCollege and SUNY.” – *Senior Vice President and CNSE Chief Executive Officer Alain E. Kaloyeros, who began working with Philip when CESTM was still in the planning stages*



# Full Circle

By Mary Fiess



**This year, something he never anticipated happened to George M. Philip, B.A.'69, M.A.'73: He became his *alma mater's* 18th president.**

Philip's history with the University at Albany spans 44 years. In 1965, he arrived for his freshman year at what was then the "new" (uptown) campus. It was still under construction, and students met for many classes in a variety of rented spaces.

UAlbany changed his life. "Were it not for the University at Albany – or Albany State, as it was still known when I first arrived on campus – I would not have been able to attend college," recalls Philip. "Once here, I was exposed to people and ideas I had never experienced before."

Initially a math major, Philip switched his major to history, largely because of the late Harry Price. He describes Price as "a great professor, a great mentor."

At the University, Philip found lifelong friends. In the Dutch Quad cafeteria, he met his future wife, Sandra Ancowitz, B.A.'68, M.A.'72. He remembers: "She would go there to study; she was very diligent. Our first date was on April 1, 1967. Sandy's 21st birthday was the day before. We went to the Delaware Theater, and we saw 'Georgy Girl.'"

After graduating, Philip taught history at Linton High School in Schenectady. A year later, he married Ancowitz, who was then teaching French at Guilderland High School.

Much as he enjoyed teaching, Philip took a job as a field representative with the New York State Teachers' Retirement System in 1971. The Philips were thinking about children, and the position offered a higher salary. It also became

the first step toward a 36-year career.

At the retirement system, one of the 10 largest public retirement funds in the U.S., "I was willing to take on challenges," says Philip, who retired as executive director. "Very quickly, I was a problem solver."

Even as he moved up the ranks at the Teachers' Retirement System, Philip continued his education. He earned his master's in history from UAlbany in 1973, and his law degree from Western New England Law School in Springfield, Mass., in 1978.

Philip's law-school education served him particularly well when he began negotiating real-estate transactions at the retirement system. His work experience and his legal background were also assets when he took on his first volunteer assignment for the University in 1992 at the behest of then-President H. Patrick Swygert.

"I received a phone call from Pat. He said: 'I just read [in the newspaper] that you are one of our alums – a two-time alum. Why aren't you here helping me?' A couple of days later, I was on The University at Albany Foundation Board of Directors."

Philip's first assignment: to help with plans for the Center for Environmental Sciences and Technology Management (CESTM), the first facility on the site where UAlbany's nanotechnology research-and-development complex is now located. CESTM brought together University researchers and businesses to promote economic development in New York State and the Capital Region. Today, the 800,000-square-foot complex – home of the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering (CNSE) – is the most advanced such research enterprise at any university in the world. It



Sandra Ancowitz and George Philip, pictured in their graduation photos, met at UAlbany and later married.

**"I don't think I ever met a more engaged volunteer. If he makes a commitment, he follows through. George is a man of integrity. He tells it like it is. He thinks about others before himself. It's not about him. UAlbany will have his total dedication as president."**

*– Former University at Albany President Karen Hitchcock, who worked with Philip during her tenure*



The Philip family gathered for the 2007 Citizen Laureate Dinner. George Philip was one of three Community Laureates honored at the event; two Academic Laureates were also recognized.



In February, Philip took time out for some fun at the Big Purple Growl.

**“With great dedication and candor, he has built a relationship of mutual respect between the administration and the faculty.”**

– *Distinguished Teaching Professor of Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences John Delano, who chaired the University Senate last academic year*

boasts more than \$5 billion in high-tech investment, attracts corporate partners from around the world, and offers students a one-of-a-kind academic experience.

Soon afterward, Philip helped to negotiate the purchase of a former pharmaceutical company property in Rensselaer County. Now UAlbany’s East Campus, the site houses the School of Public Health, the Cancer Research Center, and private biotech and pharmaceutical facilities.

Such auspicious efforts on the University’s behalf drew attention. In 1995, then-Gov. George Pataki appointed Philip chair of the University Council, a position he held until he was named UAlbany’s interim president in November 2007. As co-chair of the *Campaign for the Libraries*, he enthusiastically raised funds for the Science Library, the first new academic building constructed on the uptown campus since its completion more than three decades before.

An original board member of Fuller Road Management, the entity that oversaw construction of CESTM, Philip also served on the board of the Student Housing Corporation, which managed construction of Empire Commons, the apartment-style student housing located on the western edge of the campus. He has also served on the SUNY Research Foundation Board of Directors and chaired UAlbany’s Athletics Steering Committee.

Last May, the University Council, which is responsible for leading presidential searches, unanimously recommended to Chancellor-elect Nancy L. Zimpher that Philip be named UAlbany president. In turn, she proposed the appointment to

the SUNY Board of Trustees.

“All of us involved with the search for a permanent president knew George Philip would be the right leader at the right time for the University at Albany,” said Zimpher, now chancellor. “It took some doing to persuade George we were right, but it was well worth the effort, and in the best interests of the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the greater SUNY and Albany communities.”

Philip was deeply honored when Zimpher asked him to continue his service to UAlbany. “I have seen the University at Albany grow into a world-class research institution, and I firmly believe that all of us working together can take UAlbany to new heights,” he says.

At the same time, Philip realizes that recession-related challenges are inevitable, as are difficult decisions about the University’s future. He firmly believes, however, that the current fiscal challenges will ultimately provide UAlbany an opportunity to position itself as a stronger institution. At his direction, the University will soon embark on a strategic planning process.

“UAlbany is a great university,” Philip adds. “We see this in the quality of our students, faculty and staff; in our vibrant research enterprise; and in the accomplishments of our more than 145,000 alumni worldwide. Our freshman class this fall is one of the most academically accomplished and ethnically diverse in recent history. At the end of the day, it is all about our students.

“We have tremendous strengths to build upon. This is the time for us to plot our future.”



“Whether it’s Moving-In Day, commencement or any number of athletic events, President Philip has fervently demonstrated his enthusiasm and pride in UAlbany and its students.”

– Brian Tregerman,  
University Council  
undergraduate representative and former  
president of the  
UAlbany Student  
Association



Top: Philip greets a new student on Moving-In Day in 2008.  
Center: UAlbany Chancellor’s Scholars meet with Philip in his office.  
Bottom: Philip shares a laugh with other Fountain Day celebrants.

## Five Things You Probably Didn’t Know About George Philip

**1** His parents immigrated to the U.S. from Cyprus. He was their firstborn son.

**2** While he was a student at UAlbany, Philip would take the Mountainview bus back home to Kingston, N.Y., and work two 16-hour weekend shifts at the family business, Michael’s Diner. Afterward, “I’d sleep a couple of hours and take the bus back to Albany,” he recalls.

**3** On their second date, George Philip and Sandra Ancowitz “saw the Lovin’ Spoonful perform. We had lots of good concerts on campus and downtown.”

**4** The couple married after Philip returned from National Guard advanced infantry training – missing a tooth. “Sandy’s dentist put a piece of white plastic in the spot. You can see it in our wedding photos,” says Philip.

**5** Wed nearly 40 years, the Philips have three sons and several grandchildren. The newest addition to the family is granddaughter Lucy, born in July.