



# Coming Home

A pragmatist, an optimist and a man of deep faith, David R. Anderson '74 prepares to become the 11th president of St. Olaf College.

*By Amy Gage*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT SULLIVAN

**O**n a recent Wednesday morning in Granville, Ohio, the soon-to-be president of St. Olaf College was starting his day in the usual way. He was walking his aging dog, Troy.

They departed, as they always do, at 6:30 a.m., stepping out the front door of the Cape Cod-style house where David R. Anderson '74 has lived for the past seven years and turning left, toward the paved path that leads to the off-leash dog park. A sometime gardener, Anderson comments on the dewy grass, a brilliant shade of Irish green on this sunny April morning. He likes to bicycle on the path when he has time on weekends; he doesn't run, he says, "unless I'm chasing something, like a tennis ball."

Anderson, 53, is a disciplined man, even a methodical man. He walks briskly, and he tells Troy precisely when it's time to leave. On the way back to his house, where his daughter, Elizabeth, a high school senior, and his wife, Priscilla Paton, will be stirring — though hardly prepared for guests, he notes wryly — Anderson describes the colleague who will succeed him for a year as the interim provost at Denison University.

Keith Boone, currently the associate provost, has worked at Denison for 20 years and has been in the provost's office since 1992. He is capable and conscientious, Anderson says, adept at navigating the sometimes testy relationships with faculty that a provost has to manage, but Boone prefers to leave to his predecessor the public speaking and fund-raising that Anderson has made a hallmark of the job.

"David has got all the right stuff to be a college president," says Julia Beyer Houpt, vice president of university resources and public affairs at Denison, a liberal arts college that, despite its "university" handle, shares many of St. Olaf's core strengths. Like others at Denison, she says she is losing both a colleague and a friend. She gave Anderson a Martin Luther bobble-head doll as a congratulatory gift to augment the toys he keeps in his office as mood-lighteners during difficult conversations.

Shortly after Houpt was hired, Anderson asked her to teach him how to raise money. A former English professor whose expertise is 18th-century British literature, Anderson said he wasn't sure that he ever wanted to be a college president, but he thought he should know how to work with donors, "just in case." Years later, "it's like having two presidents to take on the road," says Houpt, a Denison alumna. "You don't always find that in a provost. He understands vision and strategy, and he is equally good in front of a large audience or one on one."

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— DAVID R. ANDERSON '74

Anderson's minister, Pastor Wayne Zavotka, sees leadership qualities in him as well. For five years Anderson has served as either president or vice president of the church council at Hosanna Lutheran Church in Pataskala, Ohio, the only ELCA congregation in the area. ("This is Methodist and Baptist territory," says Zavotka with a grin.) During his tenure as council president, Anderson has overseen touchy personnel issues — including the church's awkward parting with an associate pastor — and disagreements about how to use the small facility.

"David was a strong advocate for preschool development in the Sunday school space," Zavotka says. "He asked, 'How do we do both? These two have the same mission.' He has helped us mature and set the bar for a new council president. David has taught us how to listen to each other, how we can develop as disciples."

### MORE ABOUT DAVID R. ANDERSON '74

**EDUCATION:** Bachelor of Arts (English and American studies), St. Olaf College, 1974; Doctorate in English, Boston College, 1978; Institute for Educational Management, Harvard University, 2000; Center for Dispute Resolution, Capital University, training in mediation, 2005.

**FAMILY:** Married to Priscilla Paton, a writer and scholar; son, James Anderson, 21, a junior at Grinnell College, and daughter, Elizabeth Anderson, 18, who will enter Kenyon College in the fall.

**CAREER:** St. Olaf College, 1978–80: assistant professor of English and tutor in the Paracollege; University of Kansas, 1980–81: post-doctoral fellow in English; Texas A&M University, 1981–93: positions included director of undergraduate studies in English; Florida Atlantic University, 1993–97: professor of English and associate dean of arts and humanities; Luther College, 1997–99: vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college.

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:** Consortium for a Strong Minority Presence at Liberal Arts Colleges, steering committee; Emeriti Health Solutions, secretary of the advisory council.

**INTERESTS:** A scholar of 18th-century British literature, Anderson loves words and has a passion for the "hard-boiled detective novel." Among the numerous academic articles he has published are two on American detective novelist Rex Stout. He also enjoys cooking, tennis, gardening and international travel.

**JUST FOR FUN:** Anderson enjoys detective novels by Robert B. Parker, Dennis Lehane, Robert Crais and John Sandford. He burned a CD, *Dad's Cool Tunes*, for long car rides that includes songs by They Might Be Giants, Tracy Nelson, John Lee Hooker, Diana Krall, the Beatles and an a cappella group at Denison called Ladies' Night Out.

[www.stolaf.edu/anderson](http://www.stolaf.edu/anderson)

### BORN TO LEAD?

It is tempting, especially in a college-sponsored magazine, to advance the notion that David R. Anderson was destined for greatness. That he, more than the other two David Andersons in his St. Olaf class, was earmarked to return three decades later to lead the college he dearly loves. Certainly he showed aptitude as a young man: as a gifted writer, a serious and committed student, and, later, an exacting English professor. But his vita suggests no interest in higher education administration until almost two decades after he graduated from St. Olaf.

That makes the "born to lead" storyline about as fanciful as the plots in the detective novels that President-elect Anderson once studied and still loves to read.

In fact, as Anderson himself likes to joke, his college years show a remarkable knack for misreading the institution's future course. He aligned himself with three parts of St. Olaf that came to bitterly contested, controversial ends: as a student worker at WCAL, a resident of Ytterboe Hall and a graduate of the Paracollege.

One of his college buddies recalls Anderson less as a would-be president than as, simply, a decent guy, one who liked intelligent women and showed little interest in partying. "He was probably my closest friend, especially sophomore year," says David P. Anderson, a management analyst with the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and one of the three David Andersons in the Class of 1974 who all roomed together for a time.

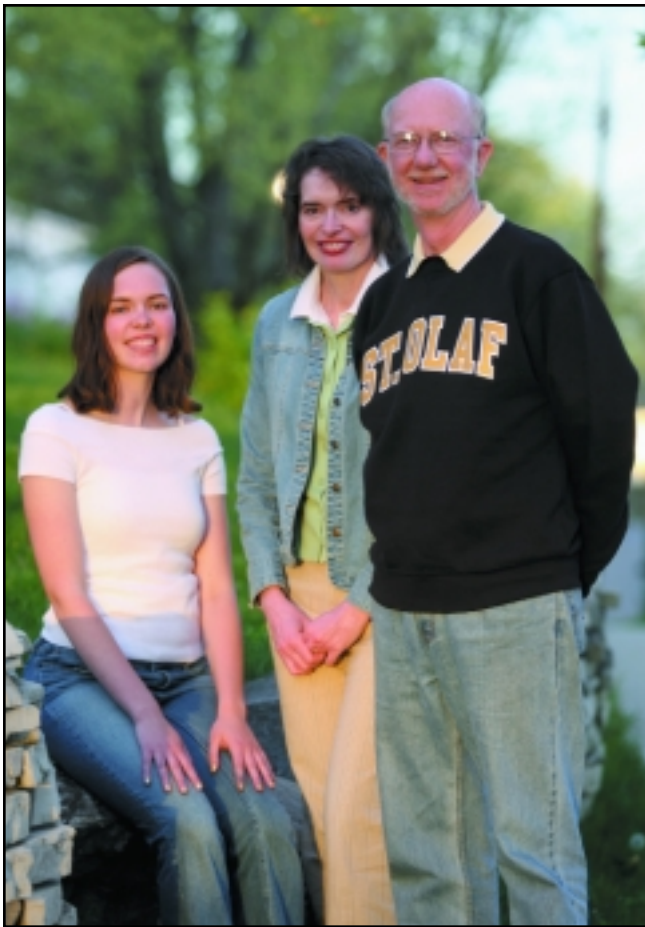
"I remember talking about everything, absolutely everything. I knew that he was excellent at English literature. One of his pet peeves was grammar," says David P., laughing at the memory. "If somebody would use *quote* instead of *quotation*, it would drive him up the wall. He would say, '*Quote* is a verb. *Quotation* is a noun.'"

That attention to the nuances of language remains today. Told by a St. Olaf staff member that he should reference both of the Twin Cities, rather than only "greater Minneapolis," when he addressed a group of college presidents, businesspeople and legislative leaders at the Minneapolis Club in April, Anderson wrote back promptly in an e-mail: "Word to the wise!" His subsequent speech mentioned St. Paul first.

Pastor Zavotka calls Anderson a "non-anxious presence," a description that gives Anderson pause when he hears it repeated. "That is a learned behavior," he replies. "By nature I am somewhat impatient."

Self-discipline and adaptability are essential traits for any leader — the ability to size up a situation and know intuitively when to take action, or when it is more effective to observe and listen, to watch and wait. Anderson's colleagues at Denison invariably describe him as calm and humble, a collaborative leader. He dismisses the suggestion that his work is akin to that of a psychologist ("I would hate to take that label on"). But he does quote a friend of his, a religion professor who likes to say that the job of a pastor "is to comfort the troubled and trouble the comfortable."

As a pragmatist, an optimist and a man of deep faith, Anderson cottons to that description.



David R. Anderson '74 and his wife, the scholar and writer Priscilla Paton (center), will be empty-nesters when they move to Northfield in July. Daughter Elizabeth (far left) will be studying writing at Kenyon College in Ohio, and son James will be a senior at Grinnell College in Iowa. Paton, currently an associate professor of English at Denison University, has accepted a visiting scholar position at Carleton College, a mile from her new home.

Harvard Seminar for New Presidents, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in mid-July. Among the topics to be explored are strategic planning, fund-raising and academic leadership — as well as a seminar called “Life of the President,” which deals with issues such as the role of the president’s spouse and how to handle entertaining.

### A FAMILY MAN

Like a growing number of college presidents these days, Anderson is married to a professional with a distinct career. Priscilla Paton is a professor and a writer in her own right, as well as a mother of two bright and accomplished children — James, 21, is finishing his junior year at Grinnell College, and Elizabeth, 18, will be a first-year student at Kenyon College this fall.

Over the years, Paton and Anderson have negotiated their work and home lives like any modern two-career couple, with no road map, a dash of humor and a large dose of flexibility. Anderson irons his own shirts and does the family cooking on weekends. Paton accompanies Elizabeth to out-of-town track meets when he has to work. “We’re in a transitional era,” Paton explains. “One person is not the sole homemaker in many families. We’re all working on a model where both parties are engaged outside the home.”

The move to Minnesota is, of course, a boon to his career, but her professional life, by necessity, will undergo some reshaping. Paton teaches English part time at Denison, as she has at other colleges where her husband has worked. With her recent scholarly interest in environmental studies, including a book-in-progress that examines the representation of animals in literature and popular culture, she would seem a natural to teach at St. Olaf. Both Paton and Anderson agree, however, that they want to separate her roles as a scholar and as the president’s wife (or the “first spousal unit,” as she jokingly calls herself), at least initially.

Rather than seeking to teach at St. Olaf, Paton has accepted a visiting scholar position at Carleton College next year. “Intellectually and psychologically, I think that’s better,” says Paton, who has published a book for children and an acclaimed scholarly book, *Abandoned New England*, which focuses on five American visual artists and poets, including Winslow Homer and Robert Frost. Meanwhile, like a slew of presidential spouses before her, she will invent her role as she goes along. She sees it as the job of a presidential couple “to foster a sense of community support and interest.” She will travel with her husband when she can and where she’s needed. “But I am not the college president, and I wouldn’t speak for the college as the president would or should,” Paton explains.

“I am the chief academic officer,” he says of the job he has held at Denison since 1999. “That means I deal with budgets, hiring, tenure and promotion. I have to have my eye on the big picture, but this is also high-touch, relationship-oriented work. I meet with people who have an *urgent* desire for something to happen. The more I do this kind of work, the more I learn that if you sit still, quietly, situations tend to clarify themselves.”

Among his initial priorities at St. Olaf, when he moves to Northfield in July, will be getting to know faculty and staff members, developing a rapport with the Board of Regents and establishing the working culture of the president’s office. “We’ll need to get stuff done like *that*,” he says, snapping his fingers.

Off campus, he will need to meet alumni and donors. Already, the St. Olaf advancement team has mapped out an ambitious calendar of visits. “It appears there will be no sleeping at home,” Anderson says, acknowledging that his biggest challenge during his first year in office will be to maintain a presence on campus while doing the amount of travel that a new presidency requires.

He will learn to be a college president the way he learned to be a provost, after years of administrative duties and teaching English at the likes of Luther College, Florida Atlantic University and Texas A&M University. “I’ll learn by watching other successful presidents do their work,” says Anderson. “You move cautiously, trust your instincts and listen carefully.”

He’ll attend what he calls “presidential boot camp,” the

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Looking around Anderson's office at Denison, you notice immediately that he's a family man. A black-and-white portrait of Priscilla sits to the right of his computer. A photo of Troy, the black lab mixed "with some skinnier breed," shows the dog in his prime, with a young James beside him. The office also sports a Dick Tracy drawing, a box of St. Olaf golf balls that Anderson received after participating in his 30th class reunion, two boxes of Kleenex, a framed award for distinguished teaching from Texas A&M and a cassette tape — a gift from a former student that purports to have the music of Bach but on the cover shows a portrait of Anderson's favorite writer, Samuel Johnson.

Elizabeth, who inherited her mother's large eyes and high cheekbones, says she learned negotiating skills from her father. He picked them up from businesspeople, particularly during his advanced management studies at Harvard. "Academics don't learn to negotiate," Anderson says. Both parents taught her to be open minded, says Elizabeth, "to be a good person in general."

Now, as Elizabeth leaves Granville to study creative writing at Kenyon, 40 miles away, her parents are setting off on their own adventure. For Anderson, a Midwesterner whose parents still live in La Crosse, Wisconsin, the move to Northfield is something of a homecoming. For Paton, who grew up on a dairy farm in Maine, it will be a chance to explore a new landscape and to continue her investigation of animals in a pet-loving, urbanized society. Her recent publications include an article on the practice of swimming with dolphins and another on deer overpopulation.

Zavotka, the family pastor, compares Anderson's anticipation of the move to St. Olaf with that of a child on Christmas morning. "He told me, 'I get to help shape a college of the church. I get to do this!'" he says. "Christ's grace is central to David in the way he interacts with other people. The welcoming nature of the Gospel is very important to him. It informs his social conscience.

"At this church he has consistently pushed the envelope without pushing people over the edge," says Zavotka. "We will miss him." ■

**Amy Gage** is director of marketing-communications at St. Olaf College.

and new technologies allow more people to survive a health crisis and live with ongoing health problems. Changing healthcare delivery and payment systems have resulted in more rapid hospital discharges, increased use of outpatient and home-care services, greater demand for long-term care for the elderly, and increased use of health-promotion and illness-prevention programs.

All of these shifts require more nurses, as well as nurses with more sophisticated expertise. The good news is that nursing at St. Olaf continues to be in high demand. "We continue to receive more applications than we can accommodate and have expanded our enrollment to 48 students, 24 at St. Olaf and 24 at Gustavus, beginning with the Class of 2007," says Rita Glazebrook.

Young women and men are responding to the nursing shortage and discovering new opportunities in healthcare. To stay current, the nursing program has revised its curriculum, with more emphasis placed on health promotion, multidisciplinary practice in integrated healthcare systems, cultural competence, gerontology, care coordination and community-based care — all designed to prepare St. Olaf nursing graduates for leadership roles in the 21st century.

"Ole nurses are strong anchors, move at a deeper level of awareness and have a thoughtful perspective on life, faith and God," says Professor Emerita Mary Johnson. "A patient might think, 'Here's somebody who has reflected deeply about her spirituality and place in the world. Here's somebody whom I can trust.' Every patient interaction has so many possibilities for healing."

Just as St. Olaf nursing faculty point with pride to outstanding graduates, students credit their professors with having high ethical standards and a strong passion for nursing — and with teaching them the art of caring along with the science of health care.

Nursing senior Aubrey Rice has had clinical experiences in pediatrics, oncology, cardiology, public health, maternity and mental health. Like hundreds of nursing students before her, Rice says she will always feel connected to St. Olaf because of the relationships she has developed in the program.

"Every Tuesday and Thursday morn-

ing my alarm goes off at 5 a.m. and I stumble into a dark, cold van with my classmates to head for Abbott Northwestern Hospital for our clinicals," says nursing senior Breanna Peterson. "I arrive at the front door excited to care for patients and a little worried that I won't be able to handle the challenges of the day. I've seen a lot of pain — people who lack access to healthcare, families struggling to care for a loved one — and death."

The St. Olaf Nursing Program has enhanced her compassion, cultural sensitivity and humility. "But most importantly," says Peterson, "it is preparing my heart." ■

**Carole Leigh Engblom** is editor of *St. Olaf Magazine*.

#### BACK TO THE FUTURE [from page 47]

work, and if we select them, we take a small percentage of their sales," Lindsay explains.

The affable Todd, who is prone to losing his cell phone, concedes that he is the "scattered and creative" personality in the relationship. Lindsay moves with the efficiency and determination of a woman striving to run a business and maintain a household of four children and numerous pets, including three cats and a pony. And yet she is the one to whom employees turn when they are troubled or have questions.

"You can tell an establishment that has good or bad owners. It shows in the employees' faces and their attitudes," says waitress Peggy Hanson, one of the empty-nest, well-mannered mothers whom Lindsay hires to lend elegance and sophistication to the restaurant.

Hanson teaches etiquette to high school and college students in town, and she recently conducted a class for Ole Store employees at Lindsay's request. The theme: going above and beyond the expected. Hang up a customer's coat. Fold a napkin correctly. Adopt the persona of a hostess welcoming guests to her home.

"I think of this as a place where everyone wants to be," says Hanson, whose younger daughter is a senior at St. Olaf. "I see everybody in town here. It's the gathering place."

Which brings the Ole Store full circle, back to its roots. ■

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