



Dr. Ripich's DEBUT

Ever since **Danielle Ripich** arrived on the scene, the University of New England has been growing, innovating, and adding to its cadre of healthcare offerings. It's no coincidence. Meet the powerhouse behind Maine's largest private university.

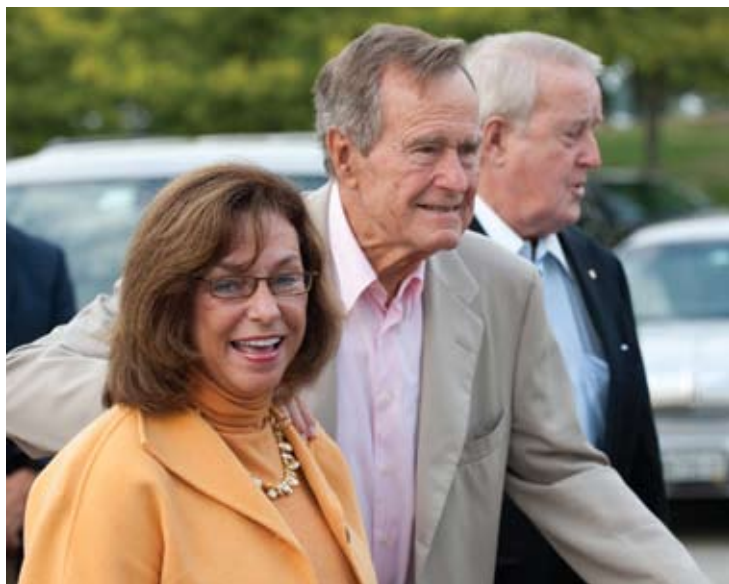
BY TORI BRITTON & MARK WELLMAN • PORTRAIT BY IRVIN SERRANO

Becoming a university president wasn't even on her radar screen. In 2006, Danielle Ripich, a dean at the Medical University of South Carolina, was approached by the University of New England's presidential search team and asked to apply. She politely declined. But then she researched UNE on the web, and was impressed. When the search team called her again, she said she'd consider it. "It was the only presidency I've ever applied for," she told Seacoast Online.

While UNE had grown recently and was already Maine's top educator of healthcare professionals, Ripich saw even more opportunities. Coming out of the gate, she began working on a four-year pharmacy program; it accepted its first students in 2009. She spearheaded a \$26 million expansion of the Biddeford campus, including a classy new residence hall and an electric-blue synthetic field. Some of the progress came from leveraging existing resources, such as launching an online Master of Science in Education. Other projects were highly complex undertakings, like the dental school scheduled to open in 2012. Last December, the Harold Alfond Foundation gave Ripich and her team another vote of confidence by pledging \$10 million, with most of the funds going toward a new athletic complex.

Dr. Ripich has not only brought visible changes to UNE's Biddeford and Portland campuses; she's also won hearts. You won't find a more well-liked college or university president in Maine.

Perhaps part of her effectiveness comes from her understanding of every aspect of higher education. Over her career, she's been an administrator, teacher, and research scholar, specializing in child language development and Alzheimer's disease. Whatever her secret, Danielle Ripich has what it takes to drive improvement—and she's not afraid to use it.



Top: UNE's blue astroturf field, designed primarily for stick sports like lacrosse and field hockey, is a new landmark for the Biddeford campus. Above: Danielle Ripich gets a pat on the shoulder from former president George H. W. Bush during the dedication of the George and Barbara Bush Center on the Biddeford campus, just a few miles north of the Bushes' summer home on Walker's Point.

Please tell us about your growing-up years and how you became interested in a career in education. Did you have a mentor along the way?

My parents were both teachers. I grew up in a small town in southern Ohio so dinner table conversations were all about how to motivate students, how to move them from A to B. Growing up, I thought these were really interesting problems to solve, and I became intrigued with education. And, as far as mentors, I had a number of them as I look back. I don't think anybody gets to these kinds of jobs, president of a university, without a lot of help along the way.

Where were you born and brought up?

It was a little river town, Portsmouth, Ohio. It's about 20,000 people; it was a mill town. My grandfather worked in the mills, and the steel mill went away, so in a lot of ways Maine connects very deeply with me, the small towns where industry had been, but is gone, and the work ethic of people in Maine. Those things made me feel very much at home here in this state.

Were you a high-performing academic in school? Were you studious? And how long did it take you before you thought you'd want to be in education?

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

It's interesting. I was, as a teacher's child, yes, I was a good student. I always studied hard, but I actually got married and had three children before I was 23. So I had one year of college, and then I went back after I had my children, and finished my bachelor's and my master's and my PhD with a family. I always thought that you should get two degrees for doing it that way. I was almost 40 when I finished my PhD, much later than most folks.

You took the job as president of UNE in 2006, and have been blazing trails ever since. What do you see as your major achievements over the past five years? How have you been able to get so much done?

Well, I think I've been able to get a lot done because, as I said, there's a great work ethic in Maine, and a highly energized team of people at UNE. There's this feeling that we're building a modern university. We've done six buildings in four and a half years. We built our first research-only building at the university; built two purely academic buildings; we added our library, the George and Barbara Bush Center, an informal study space for students, and added our college of pharmacy building.

The other piece that I'm very proud of: We created four centers of excellence around the good work that our faculty is doing. The Center for Land-Sea Interactions, around our marine science program; the Center for Community and Public Health; our Center for Global Humanities, which reaches beyond Maine and brings international thought leaders to campus; and then our Center for Excellence in Neuroscience. These centers don't sit within a college, but they draw on faculty across the whole university. So, they're at the intersections of learning and they're where a lot of exciting new ideas are taking place.

The University of New England educates more than 6,000 students on two campuses, and yet is still somewhat of a secret to some Maine people. Can you talk about UNE's role in Maine's educational infrastructure and its economy?

In the educational infrastructure, we educate more healthcare providers than any college or university in the state, so we have an important role. In most states, that is done by the public



Keith Matassa, marine mammal rehabilitation coordinator at UNE's Marine Animal and Rehabilitation Center, examines a sea turtle with the help of a student.

universities, but for whatever reasons it didn't happen that way in Maine, and the college of osteopathic medicine, our College of Pharmacy, the new College of Dental Medicine, and a lot of our health professions programs are the only ones in the state.

And as far as the economic contributions, we have strong ties to the health care of the state and have a budget of about \$130 million. Chuck Lawton, who does the economics column in the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, did an economic impact study for UNE last year, and he estimates our economic impact to be about \$340 million a year, direct and indirect. We know the percentage of graduates from each class who typically stay in Maine. If you look at their economic impact, that's another \$215 million, so we're up over half a billion dollars a year. I don't think people think of education that way. They think of business only as driving the economy, but we're the second-largest employer in York County, almost 2,000 employees, and then another 2,600 people that support the university in various ways.

What do you see ahead in terms of future growth for UNE?

Our College of Dental Medicine is not going to have a large number of students; we're planning on classes of 40 to 45. I think we're now close to where we ought to be in terms of size. Our plan

“I think it’s important for people to realize the value of Maine as a brand of place for education.”

is to keep a strong focus on quality and make sure we’re strategically choosing the programs where the workforce needs are. We want our kids to be able to get out and get jobs and start contributing.

You’re a frequent speaker on the importance of Maine’s colleges and universities to our state’s economy. Can you give us some statistics or an anecdote that you feel really illustrates this?

It’s not just UNE. Every institution, when you look across the state of Maine, is having a similar economic impact. We have wonderful national liberal arts colleges, Bates, Bowdoin, and Colby; we have specialty schools like Unity, Maine College of Art, College of the Atlantic; these are schools that draw students into our state. We know that, at UNE, the visitors from out of state spend about \$8 million a year when they come to visit their children. Out-of-

state students contribute about \$32 million overall to the economy of Maine. Those are all dollars they’re bringing in. You could tell that same story for every college and university in the state. So I think it’s important for people to realize the value of Maine as a brand of place for education. I do always speak about that because I think it’s such an asset for Maine.

UNE trains more Maine physicians than any other school in the world—as DOs. Some say we also need an allopathic medical school in Maine. Do you agree?

We need more physicians, whether they’re DOs or MDs. It’s important. Tufts has a group of students at Maine Medical Center; I think it’s about 30 students each year that they’re bringing in. The hope is that they will stay in Maine. I know this year we have some of those students rotating through our clinical practice in pediatrics. UNE students train at Maine Med as well. So I think everybody needs to cooperate because we need more MDs, DOs, more healthcare workers going forward. The shortages, especially as you look at the aging baby boomers, the numbers are out there. In Maine, we need all the healthcare workers we can get.

UNE is working on opening a dental school. Can you speak

»» The Ripich File

Born:

March 4, 1945, Portsmouth, Ohio

Education:

BA and MA in speech pathology from Cleveland State University, 1977 and 1978; PhD in speech pathology from Kent State University, 1982.

Career Highlights:

President of University of New England since 2006. Under her leadership, UNE has seen the construction of six new buildings, including the launch of a College of Pharmacy in Portland and the 300-bed Sokokis Residence Hall in Biddeford. Plans are under way for the UNE College of Dental Medicine to open in 2012. UNE received the largest gift in its history, \$10 million from the Harold Alford Foundation, in December 2010.

Ripich was named the Armington Professor at Case Western Reserve University 1990–1992, a Fellow in 2009 by the

Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions in recognition of significant contributions and leadership in allied health education; a Fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in 1996; and a Congressional Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1996. She served as dean, College of Health Professions, Medical University of South Carolina, 1999–2006; associate dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, 1994–1999; chair, Department of Communication Sciences, Case Western Reserve University, 1985–1994.

Books/Publications:

Ripich is widely recognized for her research in child language and in Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia. She has published extensively in her field, including books, book chapters, manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals, and she has served as an

editorial consultant to numerous medical and language journals. Her FOCUSED Program for training caregivers of persons with Alzheimer’s disease was awarded the Best Clinical Practice for 1996 from the American Society on Aging.

Affiliations:

Maine Development Foundation Board of Directors; Maine Independent College Association president and treasurer; Maine Higher Education Council Executive Board; Greater Portland Alliance of Colleges and Universities, member and past president; Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions board of directors; board, Commission on Women in Higher Education ACE State Network.

Personal:

Ripich lives in Portland. She has three grown children: Michael Ripich, Amy Roddey, and Sarah van Raalten.

about the need for such a school? Where are you in the process?

Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire is the largest geographic area in the U. S. without a dental school. So we've really been at a disadvantage in terms of getting dentists into northern New England, and particularly in Maine. When I was going around talking about our pharmacy school, almost everyone I would talk with would say, "When are you going to start a dental school?" The state legislature, everyone. So we looked at it as a critical need and decided it was something we wanted to bring into our mix of healthcare education.

The hurdle you face in a school like that is it's very expensive to start. Once we get up and going, we know we'll have students that we can train, and they'll be able to pay their loans back when they get out of school, but those start-up dollars were really hard to find. Northeast Delta Dental gave us a lead gift, \$2.3 million, but we still needed more. So the state bond that was just passed, that to me was Maine at its best. You hear so many bad stories about politics, but that was one where Gary Connor and Jon Courtney, Gary on the Democratic side and Jon on the Republican, reached across the aisle, jointly sponsored a bill. It was not in the governor's bond package, it was not in the leadership's bond package; this was a grassroots effort in the legislature for us to be able to have a state bond that would go to the voters, and the voters approved it. We now have to go apply for that bond money, but we're very hopeful that we're going to get it.

We have some basic science faculty that we can leverage already—we have anatomy, physiology, the biochemists, so we really think we're the best prepared to offer an excellent program to Maine. We have our dean on board, Dr. James Koelbl. He's been a dean at two other dental schools, worked at the American Dental Association—he's kind of the dean of deans of dentists. So we think he's going to help us build a really

strong school for Maine.

UNE recently received the largest gift in the school's history, \$10 million from the Alfond Foundation for a new athletic center. Why was that a priority for UNE?

We see ourselves as a health-science or health-focused institution, so providing a healthy lifestyle for students is critically important. In Maine there's so much of the year with weather that doesn't allow students to get out of doors as much as we would like. The new athletic complex will have ice and we'll be able to have hockey. We have men's hockey now, and we will have women's hockey. It's the first time we've said this publicly; it's the fastest-growing NCAA sport. We'll have a basketball performance gym, all of those things.

The interesting thing is this goes beyond athletics. The Harold Alfond Athletic Complex is going to transform the campus. It's going to become the community center. We're going to have a workout room. It's going to have an informal study, coffee, sort of a Starbucks place for students. We're having classrooms in that building for athletic training classes. It's going to be really a hub of activity, and it's set up so that we can seat 3,500 people. Right now our largest classroom on that campus is 125. This will allow us to have concerts, lectures—we can hold graduation on our own campus for the first time—so it's really a transformative gift and structure.

Athletics are important because they build a sense of community. Just to give you an example, we put in a blue field, an artificial turf field last fall, with bleachers. Before, a women's field hockey game might get 25-40 students. When we built the bleachers, we were going to build 350, then expanded to 500 because we had a little extra money at the end of the project, but thought we'll never fill them. Last fall, I went to a women's field hockey game on a Tuesday evening, and every seat in the



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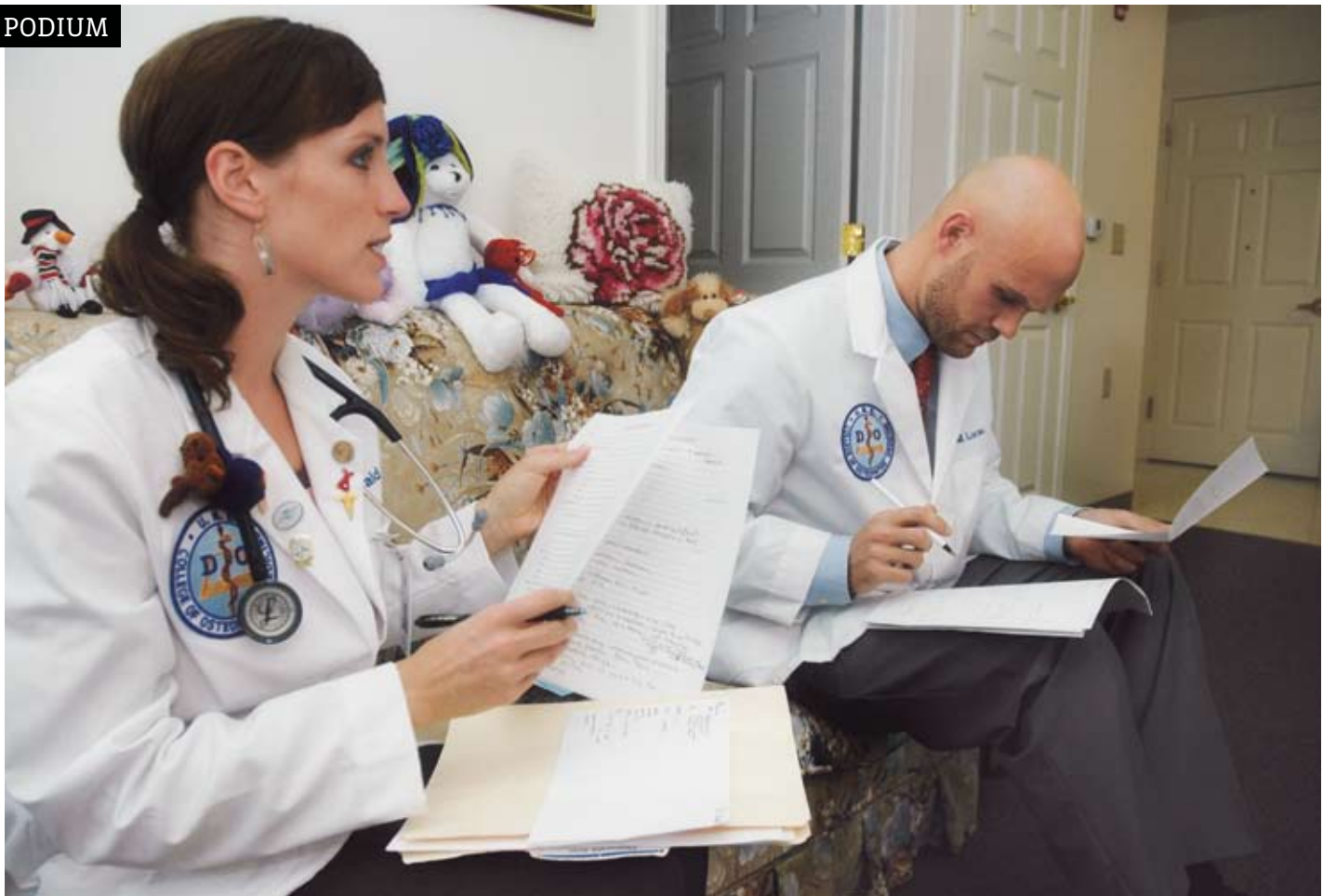
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UNE students in the osteopathic medicine program get hands-on experience at the University Health Centers in Biddeford, Saco, and Portland. UNE educates more new Maine physicians than any school in the world.

bleachers was filled, with 250 students standing around the edges. So if you have the facilities, it really creates an activity, a place for students to gather. I'm positive the same thing's going to happen with the Alford Center.

Your healthcare programs get a lot of attention. What other standout programs would you like Maine business leaders to know about?

Our marine science, our aquaculture, those are programs that we're very proud of. We have very strong students in them, we have a master's program now, and we're working toward developing a PhD in that area. The other area that I think people don't realize that we have is our business program. That's growing rapidly, and it has a nice communications component. When companies think about taking interns in business, they don't think of UNE naturally, but this is an area where we have seen a doubling each year of our applicant pool.

What's next on the horizon for UNE?

One exciting thing that's happening here is the interprofessional health education model that we're bringing to bear. Health care is going to what is called a medical home model. Now we go to our doctor's office and then we go to the dentist and

then we might go to the pediatrician and we might go to the pharmacy. What's happening is, they're creating these super clinics where you get your prescription filled, where you might have your diabetes monitored, or talk with a physical therapist about exercises for your diabetes, but everything is done in this one clinical environment. It keeps healthcare costs down, and they're finding that people get better continuum of care when they're in these clinics.

So when we build our dental clinic, the Alford Foundation has given us an extra \$3 million bonus to help support this new interprofessional education for our healthcare students. We want to create one of these clinics where our students will all be trained cooperatively, so when they go out to the workforce, they'll be ready to hit the ground running and they'll understand how to work in teams better. That's very exciting to me.

We're also starting a pilot in the fall where students at UNE can have a semester abroad at no extra cost. They can go to Seville, Spain, for the same price as their UNE tuition. They'll take two courses online, their science classes—that's always been the holdup, they couldn't go away because they'd miss their biochemistry. So we're offering their science classes online. They'll take

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Spanish and Spanish cultural studies in Spain, and we’re offering them a \$750 stipend to cover their passport and their travel. We have a business model where we think we can offer this to every undergraduate; they can study around the world without adding costs. Junior year abroad used to be a luxury that very few students could afford, so we tried to come up with something that removed the economic obstacle to give students the opportunity to learn about the world.

You came to Maine in 2006 with certain expectations and perceptions about Maine. What do you know now that you didn’t know then? What’s been harder than you thought, business-wise? Have there been any pleasant surprises?

In terms of surprises, I knew that Maine people had a good work ethic; I knew that there were small towns, but I didn’t understand the strong sense of community that Mainers have. In all the places I’ve worked in my career, I’ve never been anywhere with such a strong identity, caring for our students, caring for each other. I think it’s a quality in Maine that probably came about because Mainers had to help each other and they had to be close. There’s a real sense here of being a part of something larger than yourself.

Regarding the difficulty of doing business here, I really have found the opposite. Because of the size of Maine, I’ve been able to get to know our senators in Washington, both senators. I can call them, they know my school, and they’re able to talk in an informed way about what’s going on. The same is true of the congresspeople. Mike

Michaud, who is not our congressperson, but is in the northern part of the state, is going to be our speaker for graduation this year. He comes down and I talk with him regularly. We’re not in his district, but he cares about Maine.

Another surprise, in all the building that we’ve done, has been the quality, the care that people take, the pride in their work. In Ohio, South Carolina, other places I’ve been, I’ve not seen that. Whether it’s the electricians, the guys pouring the concrete, the carpentry, just the meticulous beautiful craftsmanship; I can’t think of anyplace in the world where you would get the quality workmanship that we get from our contractors. Maine’s a great place if you want to build something and you want to bring in people that you trust. Wright-Ryan, Allied Cook, Mike Ouellet, all the different contractors we’ve worked with, they’re just consistently very solid.

We have a new administration in Augusta. What kinds of changes are you hoping for as UNE president? Is there any specific legislation you’d like to see?

I have not yet spoken with Governor LePage, but I have a meeting with him this month. I want to encourage him to support education in Maine at all levels; I think it’s important to the future of this state. I don’t have any specific legislation that I will be lobbying for, so to speak, but there really needs to be an attitude of protecting funding and supporting higher education. I think we’re going to have tea together, so it’s going to be an interesting time to meet him and get to know him a little more. ▶



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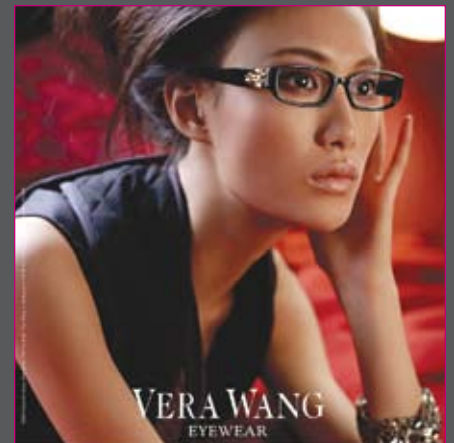
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