

A Superdome Return for Commencement

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Commencement is time for rejoicing. This year, there's added reason to cheer ? the Tulane University Commencement is back in the Louisiana Superdome on Saturday, May 17. And there's more to celebrate: It's the 10th anniversary of the universitywide ceremony.



From the floor of the Louisiana Superdome, graduates clap and cheer for their family members to thank them for their support. Commencement 2008 returns to the Superdome for the first time since Hurricane Katrina. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Solemnity and fun go hand in hand at a Tulane [commencement](#). This year is no different. Degrees will be conferred on more than 2,100 graduates next week. New Orleans music will be played.

And political commentators James Carville and Mary Matalin ? the first husband-and-wife team to be Tulane commencement speakers ? will address graduates and guests at the first commencement proceedings in the Superdome since Hurricane

Katrina hit.

“It is the one time of year that the entire university community comes together to celebrate both symbolically and substantively our successes and who we are in a very festive atmosphere,” says Tulane President Scott Cowen.

Graduates from all of Tulane's schools participate in the ceremony, marking the one occasion and only point in the year “where we can be together to honor our heritage, our history and our identity,” Cowen says.



Graduates at all levels ? bachelors, masters and doctorates ? congratulate each other at the end of the commencement ceremony in the Superdome. In addition to returning to the Superdome, Commencement 2008 marks the 10th anniversary of the celebratory event for all graduates.

Cowen reinstituted the universitywide ceremony in 1999, returning to an earlier tradition. For seven years, students, faculty, administrators, family and friends gathered in the Superdome for the unified commencement ceremony.

Then along came Hurricane Katrina, extensively damaging the Superdome in August 2005. For the last two years, the commencement ceremony has been held in the New Orleans Arena, a smaller venue than the Superdome.

The arena's more intimate setting served well for the emotional two years after the storm.

But now it's time to get back to normal. "Being back in the Superdome is another sign of normality," says Cowen.

Billie Banker, special assistant to the president, has been part of the team that has successfully pulled off the unified ceremony nine times already. But, she says, "We're still reinventing the wheel ? again." Banker is in charge of making sure everything goes according to plan and without a hitch.

"You'd think we'd do the same thing every year," says Banker, "but there's always additional tweaking."

Dr. Michael White and his Original Liberty Jazz Band will play the musical prologue and invocation as they have in the past. The academic procession will be led by Pipes and Drums of New Orleans, and trumpeters will herald the start of the ceremony.

Jazz singer Wanda Rouzan continues the tradition of serenading graduates with "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?"

The Hot 8 Brass Band ? a jazz, funk, rhythm and blues band coming out of the best of the New Orleans brass band mold ? will bring its lively sound to the intermission between the unified ceremony and the Newcomb-Tulane College diploma ceremony, which follows 30 minutes later.

After all the planning, Banker says, "We've put it on paper, now we have to have it jump off the page."