

Staff and departmental teams honored with President's Excellence Awards for extraordinary effort

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Recognized for their outstanding achievement and extraordinary contributions to Tulane University this year, 10 employees and two teams were surprised by President Michael Fitts with the annual [President's Staff Excellence Awards and the President's Departmental/Team Excellence Award](#) on Friday, Dec. 10.

Recipients were selected based on nomination letters by peers and colleagues. Staff Excellence Award honorees demonstrated success in areas including increased productivity, cost savings, enhanced objectives or humanitarian efforts. Departmental teams that were recognized showed enhancement of the student experience; honored and advanced diversity; promoted pioneering research or ensured financial stability.

Staff Excellence Award recipients received \$1,000 and Departmental/Team Excellence Award recipients received cash awards of up to \$5,000. All of the recipients will be honored at a unified recognition event in the spring.

In 2020, President Fitts recognized more than 60 individuals and two dozen departmental teams due to the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The full list of last year's recipients can be found [here](#).

(Photos by Rusty Costanza)



Roxanne Johnson, director of the Human Research Protection Office, hugs President Fitts upon receiving the President's Staff Excellence Award. Johnson has worked at Tulane for 36 years and throughout her tenure, has led the office through enormous growth. One nominator of Johnson wrote, "Roxanne Johnson has been an excellent ambassador for Tulane research activities in the community, particularly by facilitating efforts in underserved and minority populations."

[**President's Awards RSC_0778.jpg**](#)



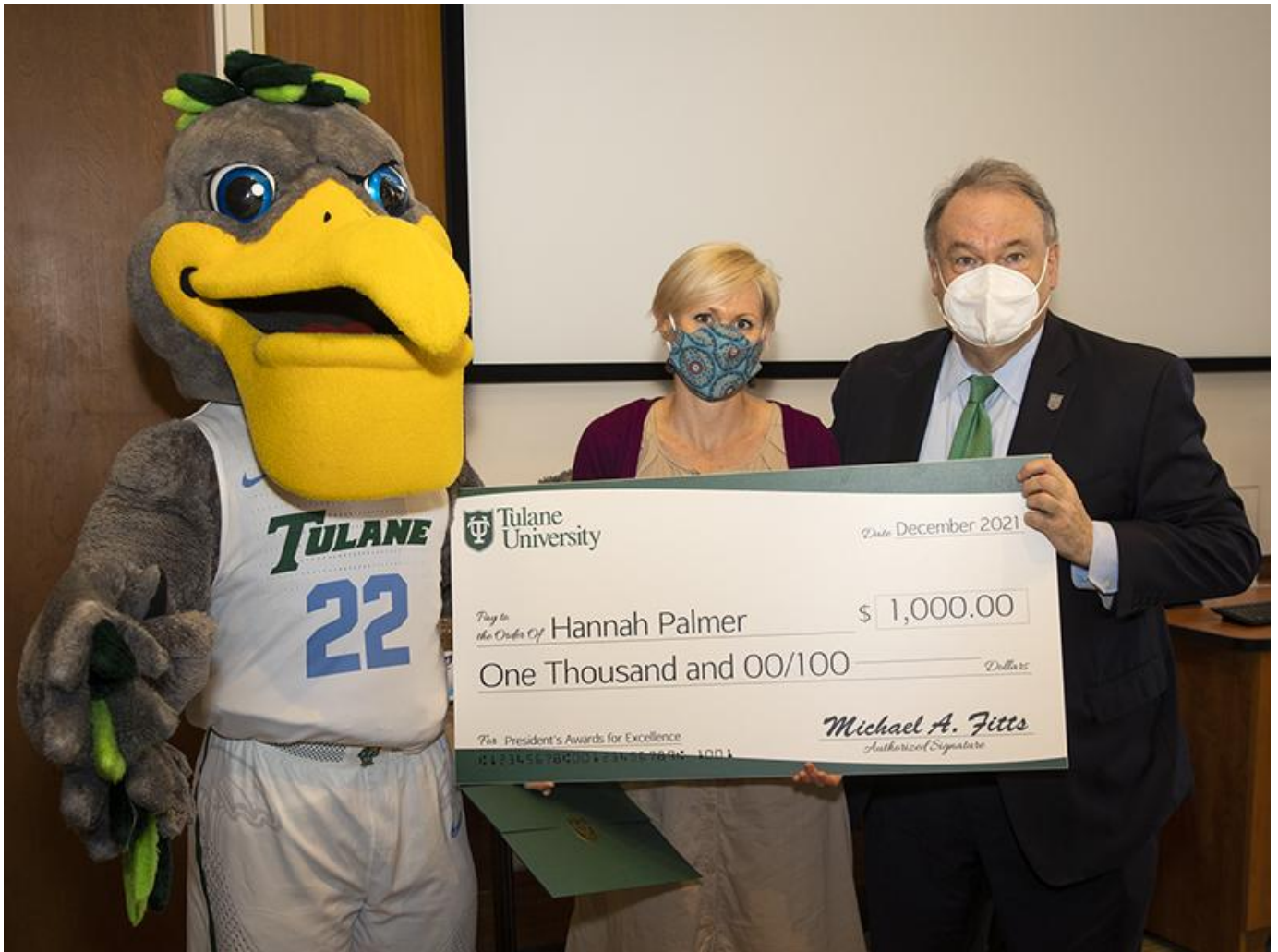
Kelly Ragland Boyd, senior education program coordinator in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, laughs with President Fitts and Riptide during the surprise award delivery. Ragland Boyd is known among her colleagues along with medical students for her role as an adviser. One student wrote in part, “It amazes me how one individual can find the time to meet all our needs and ensure the Biochemistry department functions optimally. My classmates and I would refer to Kelly as our second mother.”

[President's Awards RSC 0816.jpg](#)









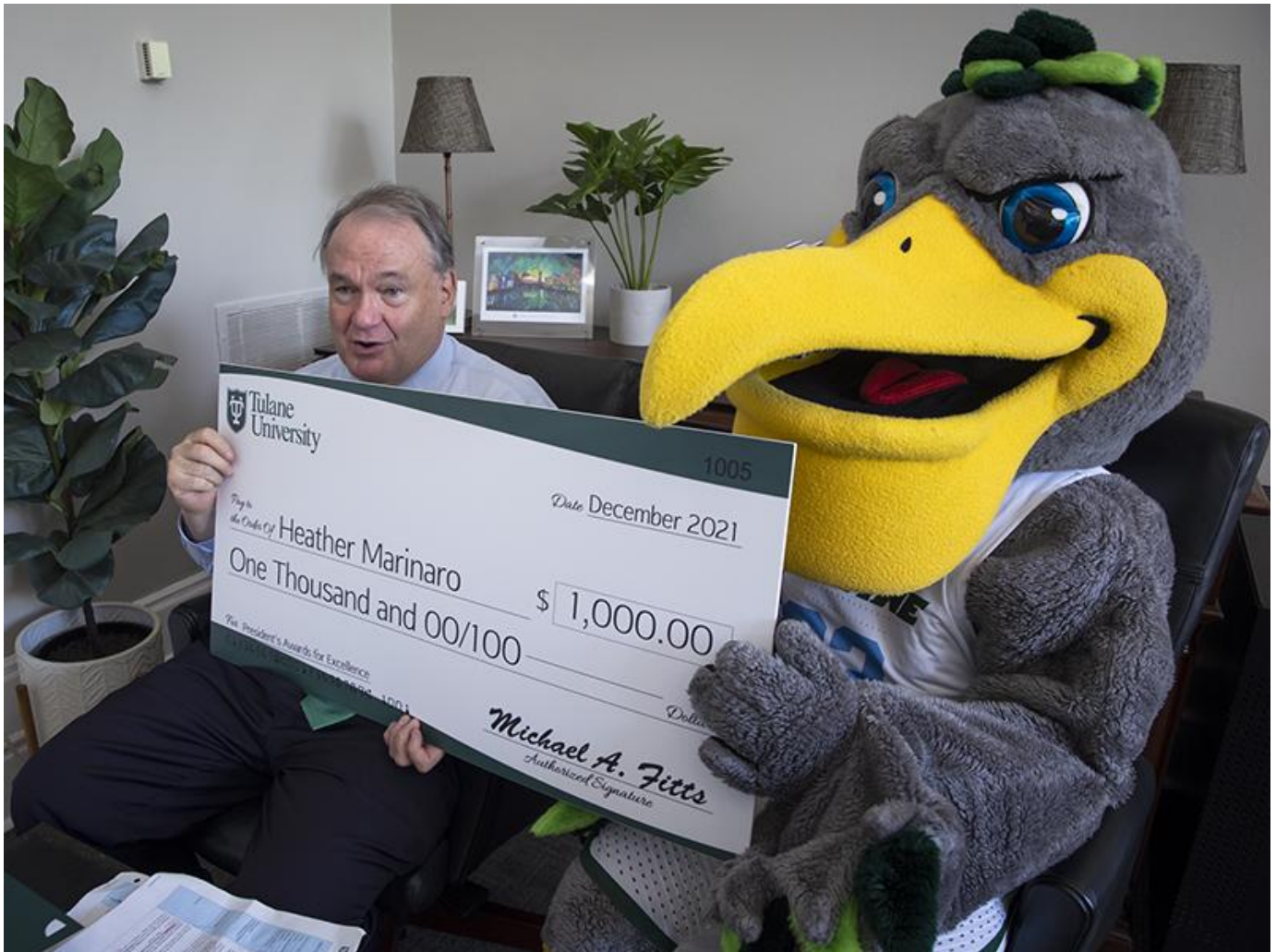












Jason Hayden, executive director of IT Operations Technology Services, is all smiles upon receiving his award. Hayden was lauded by nominators for his efforts during Hurricane Ida to ensure data center systems were available as quickly as possible and for his everyday contributions in assisting others with IT issues. "I am frequently asked what it means to be a Tulanian. My new response is to be like Jason Hayden," a nominator wrote.

The Shuttles and Transportation team plays a vital role in their day-to-day operations across campuses. The team was highlighted for their continued efforts in transporting students who tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in the pandemic to an off-site quarantine location, in addition to assisting students during the Hurricane Ida evacuation. One colleague wrote, "I am fortunate to work with such a dedicated and passionate group... staff have stepped up working off days on an almost weekly basis while themselves dealing with the effects of the pandemic and aftermath of Hurricane Ida. Both the driving staff and management team consistently go above and beyond for the Tulane community."

Sydney Nelson, zone manager of downtown Facilities Services, gives Riptide a hearty hug upon receiving his award. Nelson oversees the maintenance of the expansive downtown campus and has worked to help the university install energy saving lights throughout the downtown parking garages. “Sydney Nelson should be commended for actualizing on-the-ground solutions in support of the university’s climate action goals as well as delivering remarkable cost savings to the university,” a nominator wrote.

Hannah Palmer, program manager for the Stone Center for Latin American Studies, poses with Riptide and President Fitts with her award. Palmer leads the development and implementation of a new Graduate Student Self-Assessment and assists in producing a weekly video series featuring Portuguese-speaking community members across the university. “Hannah is my go-to brainstorming partner, an exuberant academic who is eager to collaborate on new projects and to share insights and advice for different initiatives,” one colleague commented.

Elizabeth Reyna, executive secretary for the Department of Classical Studies at the School of Liberal Arts, poses with Riptide. Reyna has helped to develop and transform the department’s workflow with an exceptional work ethic and management while providing joy and cheer to her colleagues, with one writing, “With her unflagging optimism, Liz brings out the best in us. Liz is a joy to be around, and she makes us all better people for knowing her.”

Cindy Stewart, senior executive secretary of the Department of Biomedical Engineering at the School of Science and Engineering, laughs with President Fitts and Riptide upon her award presentation. Stewart helps keep the department running smoothly, holds a wealth of institutional knowledge and is welcoming to all the department’s visitors, colleagues wrote. “Cindy Stewart is the person who holds each of the different aspects of Biomedical Engineering — the teaching and research as well as the faculty, staff, and students — all together.”

Monique Hodges, associate director of Finance and Operations at Newcomb-Tulane College (NTC), chats with President Fitts after accepting her award. Hodges works with all 17 units of NTC on their budgets and offers ongoing training and guidance. She also organized a staff reading club, NTC yoga, mindfulness initiatives and was a key contributor on the NTC Racial Equity and Cultural Competence Committee. A colleague wrote in part, “She is unfailingly thoughtful, insightful and creative. Monique is a true team player. She makes everything she’s involved with better.”

Cathy Chavez-Tsagournos, assistant director for animal resources in the Division of Veterinary Medicine at the Tulane National Primate Research Center, receives her award via Zoom. Chavez-Tsagournos and her staff remained on the TNPRC campus 24 hours a day during Hurricane Ida to ensure the animals’ safety. Additionally, the

division is regularly commended for its care by regulatory agencies thanks to her leadership. “She is willing to request and accept advice but can complete projects with very minimal direction. She encourages and promotes the advancement of staff and is an excellent mentor to new and experienced leaders at the TNPRC,” a nominator wrote.

Hong Nguyen (top left) and Tanya Stephens O’Rourke (bottom right) of the New Orleans BioInnovation Center Project team are surprised via Zoom with their awards. They were recognized for ensuring financial sustainability and promoting pioneering research by assisting the center through restructuring and back-office functions. “It is safe to say that without their efforts NOBIC would not been able to continue operating, impacting the research capacity of the City itself as well as Tulane researchers who are housed at NOBIC,” a nominator wrote.

President Fitts and Riptide record a congratulatory message for Heather Marinaro, financial services manager for Institutional Planning and Budget. Marinaro has worked to assist with Hurricane Ida student rebates and led the efforts in ensuring the COVID-19 isolation invoices match the Hyatt’s invoices and Students Affairs’ lists of students and their stays — saving the university several thousands of dollars. “Heather works tirelessly with the units she’s assigned and marches to the beat of the drum of cost savings for the university...she exhibits a fortitude to the university’s mission day in and day out, unwavering,” a colleague wrote.