

Graduate's Tulane journey was 20 years in the making

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Becky Callegan will graduate with a Master of Sustainable Real Estate Development (MSRED) from the School of Architecture. (Photo by Kacie Fayard)

Becky Callegan's Tulane story goes back to high school. Next to her senior photo in her yearbook, she listed her goal as graduating from Tulane University.

Callegan, 40, will soon celebrate graduating with a Master of Sustainable Real Estate Development (MSRED) from the School of Architecture.

Callegan's journey to this program was not without its challenges. Originally from Marrero, Louisiana, she lives in Covington with her husband, AJ, and their daughter Maelee, 14. She married her high school sweetheart and graduated with an associate degree in hospitality management. Formerly, the couple owned and operated an HVAC company on the Northshore but sold it when AJ began suffering health complications that resulted in him being diagnosed with epilepsy.

"We figured out that it was due to mold toxicity," she said. "He was exposed to mold daily from working with HVAC systems, and we also found hidden mold in our home due to a construction flaw."

They initially worked with a mold remediator who identified the location of the mold but not the cause. The remediator recommended bringing in a building scientist from New Orleans who specialized in evaluating the cause of mold in homes.

"It was a pivotal moment for me to learn about building science and building performance principles," she said, realizing she could apply her newfound knowledge in the HVAC industry.

As the couple embarked on a holistic journey to improve AJ's health, Callegan's uncle had signed her up to receive information about Tulane's MSRED program. At the time, Callegan laughed it off as an impossibility until meeting the building scientist. After AJ healed fully and became seizure-free, Callegan seriously considered returning to school.

"I had just been in the fight of my life to save my husband's life, but I sensed that God told me I needed to go back to school," she said.

She started at the School of Professional Advancement at age 38, graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in May 2023, and continued her studies at the School of Architecture.

Callegan wants to work in public policy, specifically improving construction standards to enhance indoor air quality and overall building sustainability. She is also interested in creating a nonprofit and healing space for people affected by environmental toxins in their homes. Callegan looks forward to celebrating her graduation this month and is grateful to her cohort and professors, who fully supported her throughout her journey.

“At 40, sometimes you step back and think, ‘Maybe I can’t do this.’ But I am glad I did. We are really excited about what the future holds,” she said.