

## Commencement Volunteers Ready to Roll

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Commencement is a joyous occasion for graduates and their families. And Tulane staff members who serve as volunteers at the ceremony say that meeting happy family members is a big reason why they come back year after year to assist.



Dedicated Tulane staff members, including Oscar Sill, left, and Paul Forbes, right, who have worked as wheelchair ushers, pitch in as volunteers at the University Commencement Ceremony. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

This year, 117 volunteers have signed up to help out at the Tulane Commencement [ceremony](#) on Saturday (May 15). They'll greet guests, distribute programs, handle lost-and-found items and escort people who need assistance to their seats.

Aaron Martin, manager of web communications in the university communications and marketing department, is coordinator of guest relations for commencement. Every year, Martin says, he and other staff members involved in the commencement ceremony consider how to make improvements.

"We are always watching what works and what doesn't," says Martin. A priority for the guest-relations team is accommodating people with disabilities.

Paul Forbes, director of the Elmwood campus for the School of Continuing Studies, is captain of the wheelchair ushers. These volunteers assist guests who have physical limitations that hinder their walking long distances in the cavernous Louisiana Superdome, where the ceremony is held.

Forbes says the wheelchair ushers move "like a carousel ballet," as they shuttle guests from the Gate A entrance of the Superdome, where their families drop them off, to accessible seating, and then hurry back to the entrance to aid other guests. The process is reversed at the conclusion of the ceremony.

This year, 20 people have volunteered as wheelchair ushers. Three of the volunteers, including Forbes, have performed wheelchair duty for 10 years.

Most of the other volunteers also are re-enlistees.

"We keep coming back," says Forbes, who adds that there is a strong sense of camaraderie among the wheelchair volunteers.

"Everyone is cheerful and excited. The excitement is infectious," says Forbes. "It's great to be part of."