

Saints March in at Commencement

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Three special guests in the platform party at Saturday's Tulane Commencement Ceremony weren't wearing the usual mortarboards. They had on New Orleans Saints caps, and when graduating students in the audience took notice, the first "Who Dat!" cheers rang out.



Representing the Saints ownership at the commencement ceremony were, from left, Jonathan Vilma, team captain and linebacker; Gregg Williams, defensive coordinator; and Rita Benson LeBlanc, part owner and executive vice president. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The promised "black and gold surprise" turned out to be special honors for three members of the Super Bowl champion Saints organization ? Rita Benson LeBlanc, part owner and executive vice president; Gregg Williams, defensive coordinator; and Jonathan Vilma, team captain and Pro Bowl linebacker.

As a video tribute to the Saints unreeled on the big screen and the familiar strains of the Saints' fan favorite "Halftime (Stand Up and *Get Crunk*)" played, graduates waved handkerchiefs and broke into their own versions of the "Benson boogie."

President Scott Cowen honored the three Saints representatives with his President's Medal, the highest honor the university president bestows. The [medal](#) is awarded at the president's discretion to individuals who have distinguished themselves by their actions and contributed to the well-being of Tulane University or the city of New Orleans.

Taking the lectern, Benson-LeBlanc said, "I want to commend all of you ? the 2010 world champion Tulane graduates."

Cowen donned a Saints Super Bowl champions cap for the announcement. "Just about four months ago a heart-stopping drama played out on this football field, just about where our faculty and students are sitting today," Cowen said. On Jan. 24, the Saints beat the Minnesota Vikings in overtime and were on their way to their first Super Bowl.

"The New Orleans Saints represent the drive, the perseverance and the faith through which our university and city continue to recover and renew," Cowen said. "Thank you for the historic season, the commitment to our great city and that transcendent moment when the New Orleans Saints became world champions."