

Newcomb Alumnae Association honors freedom rider

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Margaret Leonard, this year's Outstanding Newcomb Alumna, was not the average activist. Though she may have been a typical co-ed when she enrolled at Newcomb College of Tulane University in 1959, she soon became involved in the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, participating in lunch-counter sit-ins and demonstrations at Woolworth's and McCrory's in New Orleans.



Margaret Leonard of the class of 1963 is honored as the 2013 Outstanding Newcomb Alumna at the Under the Oaks celebration on Friday (May 17) during Commencement Week events. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Leonard is credited as one of the first Southern white women to participate in the Mississippi Freedom Rides, garnering national media attention in 1961. Police arrested many riders, including Leonard.

Of that time in her life, she recalls that though there was some campus opposition to her activism, "On the whole, though, Newcomb took good care of me even when I

was embarrassing the school. I had some wonderful professors, made lifetime friends, studied for a year in Paris and was never denied my scholarship or loan.”

After she graduated from Newcomb in 1963, Leonard worked as a writer and editor for various groups, including a labor union, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and a self-help housing association.

“Although I did believe in all those causes and enjoyed writing about them, I finally decided to just be a journalist, with the intention of informing people without trying to influence them,” says Leonard, who is retired now from a career of reporting and editing at the *St. Petersburg Times*, *Miami Herald*, and *Tallahassee Democrat*.

Each year a collaborative committee of alumnae volunteers and Newcomb faculty fellows choose [Newcomb Alumnae Association](#) Award recipients. Committee chair Anne Morse says that acknowledgement of Margaret Leonard's contributions are especially fitting this year.

“As we recognize the 50th anniversary of the integration of Tulane University, the consensus of the committee was that it was fitting to acknowledge a Newcomb alumna actively involved in the Civil Rights movement of the era.”

Aidan Smith is external affairs officer for the Newcomb College Institute.