

Carrying the blues torch

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Despite being a dying art, old New Orleansâ style electric blues is inside of Wade Hilts "and it got to come out!" So says local bluesmaster [Little Freddie King](#), Hilts' good friend and mentor.

At the beginning of his first year at Tulane University, Hilts, a graduating [engineering physics](#) major, met Little Freddie, along with bluesmen Guitar Lightnin" Lee and Alabama Slim, at a rare gig they were playing at the Apple Barrel on [Frenchmen Street](#).

"When they finished, I was able to talk to Little Freddie, excitedly telling him about how much I loved his music," Hilts says. "He invited me to play [supporting guitar] behind the trio the following week."

This encounter began an immersion with these torchbearers of local tradition that has lasted Hilts' entire college career.

"My sophomore year, I began playing a weekly gig with Alabama Slim's band and Lightnin" would drop by every now and then. When I left for summer break, Slim replaced me and I got to working with Guitar Lightnin" Lee," Hilts says. "By then, I was going to his house a couple times a week to listen to records and play guitar with him."

Wade and Lightnin" play together to this day, gigging at different bars on Frenchmen Street and in the [Bywater](#) neighborhood.

"I have many fond memories of driving around blasting Jimmy Reed and trying to sit in on various gigs going on. It was great to have a 70-something-year-old man jamming out to music with me like he was 18 years old!"

Besides blues music, Hilts' interests lie in working with his hands. He plans to move back to his hometown of Portland, Oregon, after graduation to finish restoring a 1969 Peugeot 404 sedan he's been working on for two years, and to pursue work as an engineer.

The 2015 Tulane Commencement ceremony on Saturday (May 16) will be [streamed live online](#). Follow us on social media at #tulane15.

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