

The earl of Commencement bids adieu

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cjs@tulane.edu



This special umbrella from [Tulane University Commencement](#) has white sparkles, dark green trim and the distinctive signature of Earl Retif in black glitter – a signature that first graced Tulane diplomas in 1976. Retif received the special gift on Saturday (May 16) on the Mercedes-Benz Superdome stage before more than 2,400 graduates and 15,000 guests. It was a well-kept surprise to Retif, and the perfect occasion: his final Commencement ceremony.

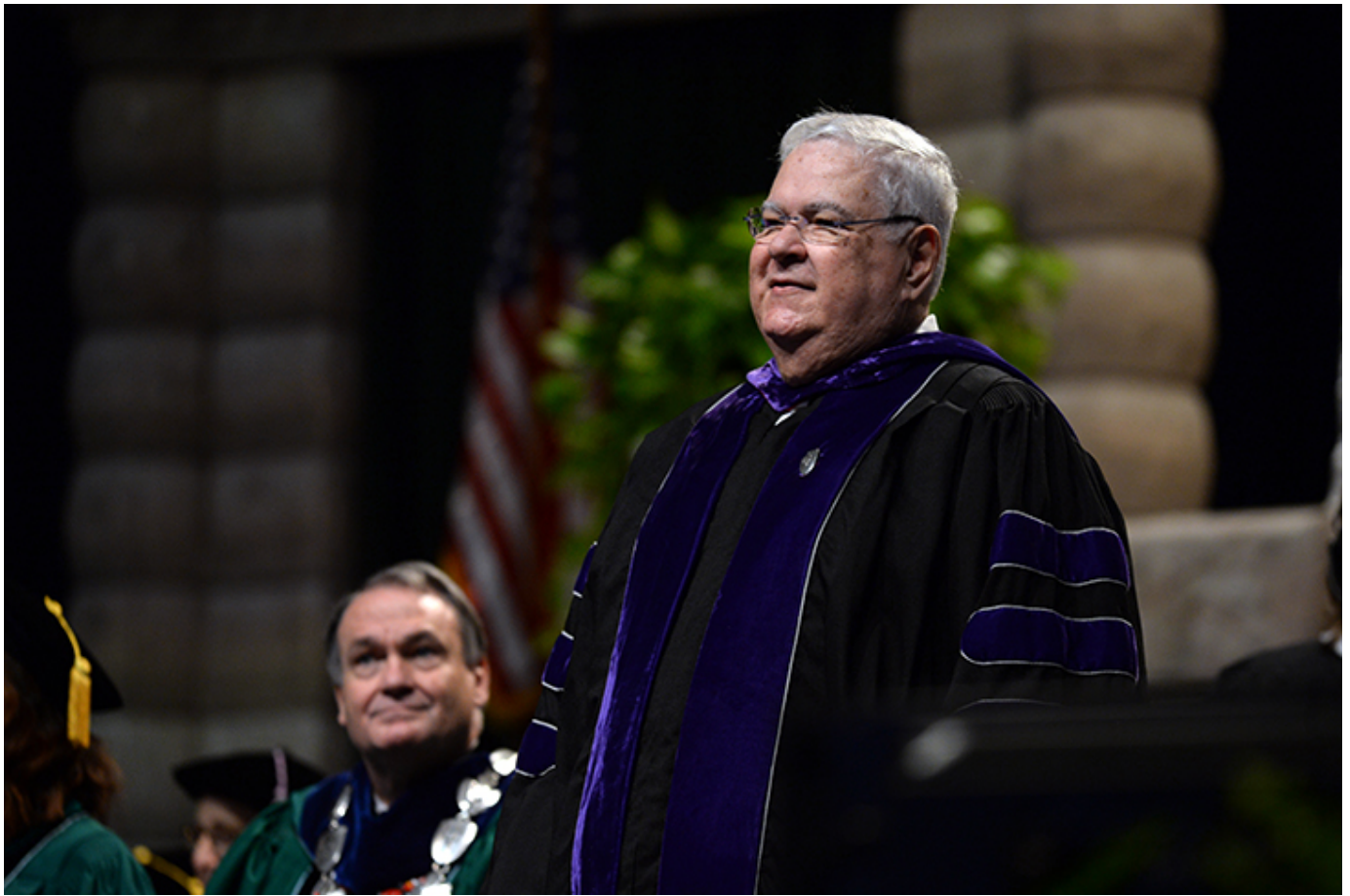
Retif will be retiring later this year from his position as vice president of enrollment management and institutional records but is leaving a plethora of traditions behind for the Tulane community. It was 17 years ago that Retif, at the request of then-President Scott Cowen, led the return of a universitywide Tulane Commencement ceremony, which had been dormant for some 30 years. He was the architect of the new ceremony, imbuing it with New Orleans music and developing the design for a university mace, a presidential chain of office and other key elements. Here's a look back at his final ceremony, his achievements, and some memorable moments from the past.



On Saturday (May 16), Retif enters the ceremony, processing with the platform party and congratulating students along the way. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)



Pausing during Saturday's teaching awards, Newcomb-Tulane College dean James MacLaren, left, announces, "I'd like to take a moment to recognize someone who deserves, but dislikes, recognition." Over one million Tulane transcripts bear Retif's signature; he has sent over 100,000 Tulane graduates out into the world and has officiated 229 diploma ceremonies. Darryl Berger, chair of the Board of Tulane, is at right. (Photo by Sally Asher)



After Hurricane Katrina, Retif took on the challenging role of dean of admission, returning the incoming class numbers to normal, pre-Katrina, levels in only two years. In the past nine years, he has brought 14,246 first-year students to Tulane. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)



In his 17 years on stage for the all-university ceremony, Retif assisted the Tulane president in bestowing university honors on distinguished guests. For this memorable [ceremony in 2009](#), Retif stood by while comedian and television star Ellen DeGeneres put on the commencement “robe” she brought from her hotel room, aided by President Scott Cowen, right. (Photo by Sally Asher)



Retif envisioned Tulane Commencement as a way to showcase performances by New Orleans musicians, including in the [2013 ceremony](#), performers Dr. John, left, and Allen Toussaint, right. Both musicians received honorary Tulane degrees at a ceremony that featured the His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama as keynote speaker. (Photo by Sally Asher)