

Celebrating 50 Years: Class of 1975 Reunion Honors Lifelong Bonds and Tulane's Evolution

|
Mary Sparacello

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Fifty years ago, Tulane's campus — and the world around it — looked very different.

Cynthia Heaberlin Beaird (NC '75, G *77) remembers a big welcome party on the quad the night everyone moved in, having to pass a mandatory swim test, and riding her bike to an early Jazz Fest that drew hundreds of people — compared to the hundreds of thousands she saw attending this year.

Rick Rees (B '75, B *75) recalls the electric atmosphere in 1973 when the Green Wave beat LSU 14-0 in front of a record-breaking crowd of more than 86,000 at Tulane Stadium. After the game, students tore down the goalposts — and stashed pieces in his fraternity house (a fact that only came out later, once it was safe to admit).

A month before graduation, Rees witnessed another historic moment when President Gerald Ford delivered a major national address at Tulane, announcing the end of the Vietnam War. “I remember exactly where I was sitting and where he was standing,” Rees said.

Half a century later, those vivid memories will come full circle as the Class of 1975 returns to campus this week to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their graduation from Tulane University and Newcomb College.

I think we are all very fortunate to see our 50th and have the opportunity to come together and celebrate.”

— Cynthia Heaberlin Beaird (NC '75, G *84)

The weekend's events begin Thursday with an uptown campus tour and conclude Saturday with the Unified Commencement in the Caesars Superdome. In between, alumni will gather for class luncheons, educational sessions at the New Orleans Museum of Art and a festive cocktail party and dinner at the Audubon Tea Room.

At the Audubon Tea Room, class members will be inducted into the Emeritus Club, and Tulane President Michael A. Fitts will present the Emeritus Club Outstanding Alumni Award for the Class of 1975 to two very deserving honorees: Rees and Jeanne Olivier (NC '75).

In addition to the honors, the reunion offers a meaningful chance to reconnect. Beaird and Rees, who are co-chairing the celebration, see the milestone as an opportunity to reflect on friendships that helped shape their college experience — and their lives.

Beaird, who was president of her Newcomb College sorority, Kappa Kappa Gamma,

said, “I appreciate the friends made from all over the country and am still close with many of them.” She also chaired her 40th and 45th reunions and is part of a group of a dozen friends who have celebrated together every five years.

Rees, a New Orleanian, had three college roommates he remains close with to this day. “If someone had told me that a guy from Ohio, a guy from New Jersey, a guy from Alabama and a guy from New Orleans would end up being as close as we are 50 years later, I’m not sure I would have believed it,” he said.

Two of those longtime friends played an unexpected role in his relationship with his now-wife, Debra Darnell Rees (NC '76, B *77). Though their paths never crossed at Tulane, he met her at a party shortly after graduation and invited her to a barbecue for a Tulane game. She declined —she was moving into a new apartment. Rees and his roommates showed up to help her move, just so she could make it to the party, even hauling her geology-major roommate’s rock collection. To this day, his friends joke that their “heavy lifting” helped get the relationship off the ground.

Those lasting friendships are just one part of what alumni say made their Tulane years so formative. The upcoming reunion also offers a chance to reflect on the professors and courses that helped shape their paths beyond college.

Beaird majored in American Studies and Elementary Education and later earned a master’s degree from Tulane in Early Childhood Education. “The academic experience was exceptional” and afforded a unique opportunity to open a preschool for Vietnamese children in New Orleans relocating after the war, which was part of her graduation program.

After Newcomb College, she held management roles at restaurant chains Victoria Station and Chili’s/Brinker International before leaving corporate America to shift to a career in residential real estate. For the past 35 years, she has been a Founding Partner/Executive Senior Vice President at Allie Beth Allman and Associates in Dallas. A Louisiana architecture course and time living in New Orleans sparked a lasting appreciation for historic buildings — one she brought home to Dallas, where she is presently restoring her fiftieth historic home.

Rees earned both his undergraduate degree in political science and his MBA from Tulane in 1975. As a first-generation college student attending on a legislative

scholarship, he made the most of the opportunity at Tulane. One of his most influential professors was John Rutledge, an economics instructor who later became a prominent figure in private equity and a frequent commentator in national media.

“People that haven’t been back on campus are going to be in awe about what they see.” — Rick Rees (B ‘75, B *75)

After graduation, Rees began his career at Halter Marine, eventually becoming chief financial officer. He has built a distinguished career in private equity, corporate finance and philanthropy. In 2001, he co-founded LongueVue Capital, a New Orleans-based private equity firm specializing in value-oriented investments in lower middle-market companies.

Rees has remained deeply engaged with Tulane over the years. He served on the Board of Tulane for 12 years and rejoined earlier this year. He also holds leadership roles on the Business School Council and many other university initiatives. “Tulane has been a huge part of my life for a number of years,” he said.

As for the reunion, Rees is most excited for classmates to see how much Tulane has evolved — both uptown and downtown. “I think people will be so surprised and impressed with how the university has changed so dramatically,” he said. “People that haven’t been back on campus are going to be in awe about what they see.”

Beaird has also remained closely connected to her alma mater. She serves on the Newcomb Institute Director’s Advisory Council and the Tulane Fund Advisory Board and is a Tulane football season ticketholder, continuing her longtime support of the university. She and her husband purchased a home in New Orleans in 2017 and spend as much time as possible there.

She hopes this year’s reunion encourages more classmates to return — especially those who haven’t visited campus in decades. “Don’t feel shy about coming. If you haven’t been to the reunions, it’ll be a positive experience, and anyone who comes will be, upon reflection, really happy they did.”