When the Congregationalists and Methodists decided to form two separate schools in 1869, I am not sure if they imagined that the two would merge in 1930 as Dillard University, open a new campus in 1935, and 150 years later in 2019, still be in existence. But that is exactly what happened. The daunting task we faced was to ensure that we commemorated their work in a way worthy of their legacies. We knew that Dillard would only turn 150 once, so we had to get it right.

We did.

It has been amazing this year hearing from all of our stakeholders, members of the local community, and of special interest for me, college and university presidents who made note of our sesquicentennial activities. Our team went above and beyond for the entire year, raising the profile of the University and celebrating our 150 years of educating young people. Please make sure to thank Dr. Marc Barnes and the entire Institutional Advancement division for their tremendous work in 2019.

I was excited watching people engage the 150 year branding efforts. Dillard was seen not only on buses and bus stops, but on billboards and in the airport. The distinctive logo was an eye catcher. Whenever I traveled invariably someone stopped me to ask about my pin, and about Dillard.

Starting off the year with a Day of Service across the city was a way to allow hundreds of students, faculty and staff to engage the community, a reminder to us all that Dillard has always been the result of diverse groups working together. Our commencement weekend was special, highlighted by a gala that raised over $1 million, headlined by the legendary Patti LaBelle. Over 1,000 people came out to support the university for this special occasion.

Our Founders’ Day weekend featured one of the most respected leaders in all of higher education, alumna Dr. Ruth Simmons, sharing a personal story about how her Dillard experience led to her historic firsts as president of a women’s college, an Ivy League university, and now an HBCU (the only person in history to have served these 3 distinct types of institutions). And we recently concluded the year with a record breaking Giving Tuesday, raising over $560,000 in twenty-four hours. In 2016 when we first attempted a Giving Tuesday, we were pleased to raise $60,000, but now our efforts today represent an almost ten-fold growth of this event.

The year 2019 was a great celebration, and we elevated Dillard University in every way possible. Now we move into 2020, a time to check our vision and make sure we have a clear direction going into the next 150 years. The higher education industry is going through seismic changes now. Many small colleges, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest, are closing. More and more families find it difficult to afford college, and dreams are being deferred without significant financial support. Sadly, people are still asking that annoying question, “Are HBCUs relevant?”

Two thousand nineteen was a great year, but our work is far from done. In this ever shifting environment we must ensure that Dillard is able to thrive. We are needed, maybe now more than ever, and our task ahead is to ensure we are prepared to meet whatever challenges there may be.
Dinner En Bleu

The Ray Charles Program in African-American Material Culture hosted Dinner En Bleu, a chic take on the Parisian cult classic, Diner En Blanc. Dinner En Bleu was a contemporary dinner featuring local guest vocalist, Erica Falls. Specifically, only 150 guests attended this Founder’s Day Weekend event to commemorate Dillard University’s 150th Founding Anniversary.

Guests were encouraged to wear bleu cocktail attire for the elegant sit-down dinner and the proceeds benefited the Ray Charles Program and its students. With the funds, the Ray Charles Program will create an archival system of New Orleans’ food culture and history. This endeavor will be attained with curriculum development in the following areas: Food Studies Minor, Restaurant & Catering Management Continuing Education courses and community building lessons with renowned chefs. The Ray Charles Program will also host records of menus and recipes that date back to 17th-century slavery in New Orleans.

Zella Palmer, endowed chair and director of the Ray Charles Program awarded the founders and proprietors of The Whitney Plantation, John & Donna Cummings with the 2019 Donor and Humanitarian Award for their support and guidance. Sybil Haydel Morial, author and former City of New Orleans First Lady was presented with the 2019 Cultural Bearer Award as was Linda Green “The Yakamein Lady,” New Orleans Celebrity Chef for shaping New Orleanian culture. Green has also assisted in career placement for students in the Ray Charles Program. The late Leah Chase’s family accepted her posthumous 2019 President’s Flame Award for her advocacy and philanthropy. The revered chef was a champion of the Ray Charles Program; Chase believed students should be taught the history behind food culture, especially in Louisiana.
The Ray Charles Program will launch its Food Studies minor for Dillard students in Spring 2020. The first two courses for the Spring 2020 semester will be Introduction to Food Studies and the Psychology of Food. The Food Studies minor involves the governance, planning, history, design, business and implementation of food systems within urban and rural environments. This degree-seeking minor program provides an integrative approach to food studies in urban environments, focused on an introduction to the study of food that is essential for preparing the next leaders in this field. For more information on the Food Studies minor, please contact Zella Palmer (zpalmer@dillard.edu). The Ray Charles Program in African-American Food Culture was established at Dillard University in 2004 by music icon Ray Charles.

**2019** Donor and Humanitarian Award: John & Donna Cummings, Founders and Proprietors of The Whitney Plantation.

**2019** Cultural Bearer Award: Sybil Haydel Morial, Author and Former City of New Orleans First Lady

**2019** Cultural Bearer Award: Linda Green “The Yakamein Lady,” New Orleans Celebrity Chef

**2019** President’s Flame Award In Tribute to Leah Chase
Dillard University celebrated its 150th Founders’ Day Convocation on October 20, 2019, with speaker Dr. Ruth Simmons, who graduated from the jewel of Gentilly’s campus in 1967. The sunny day also allowed for parents, family, friends, and staff to celebrate the Class of 2020’s impending graduation. The Convocation Service, lead by members of the senior class and students from Dillard’s Theatre Program, performed the history of the University for its founding anniversary. Audience members were also blown away by Dillard University’s sophomores Lauren and David Rhodes’ vocal range and talent when they sang “The Prayer,” as a duet.

The program transitioned with Dr. Ruth Simmons delivering her message on owning your voice to push for the life and career you desire. As she dropped gems, the former President of Brown University shared the mishaps she faced in her career and how she initially turned down the offer to become President of the Ivy League institution because she knew she wouldn’t fit the mold the University’s board was seeking. After much negotiation, she accepted the position but it still came with challenges that Simmons had to overcome. “They said ‘yes,’ they still wanted me to become President; they always say that until something happens,” Simmons shared, as the audience laughed. Simmons continued to note that upon her appointed start date, she began to investigate the history of Brown’s involvement with the United States slave trade. Her decision to look into the dark side of the University’s history ruffled feathers, with some noting that an African-American working at the institution should not attempt to raise issues. Simmons clapped back to that notion by stating: “Who else has better standing to raise that issue other than an African-American?”

Simmons with her fiery yet affable personality continued to reveal other life blunders, like the time she almost didn’t graduate Dillard. The present-day Prairie View A&M University President felt the Chapel attendance requirement to graduate was unnecessary and exclusive of those who weren’t of the Protestant faith (even though her own father was a minister). Despite the adversity, Simmons declared that Dillard helped her find her voice and gave her the courage to stand up for what she believed in. A child of sharecroppers, Simmons continues to use her voice by implementing policies in higher-education that will help those who are less fortunate.

Dillard University continues to be a pillar of faith and education in the historically Black colleges and universities sphere. Data shows, Dillard alumni effortlessly increases their financial donations, allowing current students to experience a cutting-edge education and exposure to network with trailblazers in the career industries they are most interested in.
Dillard University received $558,807 in 24 hours for the 2019 Giving Tuesday. This is an 83 percent increase from the 2018 Giving Tuesday results. The Institution’s campaign proved to be a success after receiving multiple gifts from alumni, faculty, staff, students and members from the greater New Orleans community. In previous years, Dillard University earned $305,102 (2018 Giving Tuesday), $195,687 (2017 Giving Tuesday) and $64,526 (2016 Giving Tuesday).

“This was our best #GivingTuesday yet. Going from $60,000 to over $500,000 in just four years shows the level of commitment our community has for Dillard University,” Marc Barnes, vice president of Institutional Advancement said in a statement. “We are extremely grateful to everyone who supported this campaign. Our students are the real winners. They will work hard to make our supporters’ investments worthwhile.”

On Giving Tuesday, Dillard University hosted a luncheon on its Gentilly campus for programs and departments to promote their initiatives. Telemundo (KGLA-TV) and WDSU (NBC-affiliate) attended the event to capture the excitement as members of the Dillard University rallied to meet the goal of $500,000.

Kimberly Woodard, director of Development expressed her deep gratitude to the Dillard community and stakeholders for their continuous commitment to Dillard students and their education.

“I must say, ‘thank you’ to all who graciously continue to support our fundraising efforts here at Dillard. It is amazing how alumni, faculty, staff, students and friends come together to realize a dream, that without them would never become reality,” she shared. “I am grateful to everyone who continues to support our #DUGivingTuesday efforts each year.”

Giving Tuesday funds are shared between the University’s SAFE (Student Aid for Financial Emergencies) Fund and programs/departments donors designated their monies to. Giving Tuesday funding serves as an anchor during a political climate where federal student aid loans are being eliminated. Dillard is the leading historically Black university that produces graduates with degrees in Physics. It also specializes in nursing, pre-law, business and the performing arts. Dillard University’s goal is to create a holistic education for its students, building them to be world leaders who will impact corporations in a powerful way.
Save The Date:

Alumni Weekend 2020

May 7-10, 2020

The Billy Ray Hobley Gala
February 28, 2020
More information to come.

Allstate Sugar Bowl Bleu Devil Classic
UNO Lakefront Arena
New Orleans, LA
February 29, 2020 - 3 PM
Dillard Memories

Sabree Hill, University Photographer
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