

Lepage Center's namesake establishes business teaching award for equity, diversity and inclusion

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A gift from Albert Lepage (MBA '71) has established an annual award for A. B. Freeman School of Business faculty members who excel in teaching the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. (Photo courtesy of Hebron Academy)

A gift from Tulane alumnus Albert R. Lepage (MBA '71) has established an annual award to recognize A. B. Freeman School of Business faculty whose teaching significantly advances the ideals of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

The new Albert Lepage Teaching Award for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will reward faculty members who lead the way in instilling EDI values in students. Faculty commitment to EDI can be demonstrated through courses, case studies, literature reviews, presentations, research or other methods.

Winners will be chosen based on nominations from members of the Tulane community, including students, staff, faculty, alumni and others. The Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation will collect nominations and review them through a committee. The dean of the Freeman School will make the final selection each year.

Lepage, a retired co-chairman of Lepage Bakeries Inc., is creating the award because he thinks business executives must understand the importance and relevance of EDI in order to be great leaders. Lepage's 41 years at his family's company, as well as numerous studies, prove that, he said.

"Business schools aren't the first place you think of when it comes to teaching EDI, and that should change," Lepage said. "At my company, I saw firsthand that diversity in the workplace fosters creativity and innovation. Those are key ingredients to any successful business, and they aren't automatically baked into the cake. Exposure to diverse backgrounds and ideas inspires managers and nonmanagers alike.

"I've created this award to honor Freeman faculty who are effectively teaching and promoting these very important principles, which are crucial not only for business growth but for our progress as a society," he said. "We must incorporate EDI into all parts of life and business, or we will never see the change we need."

If anyone knows the recipe for business success, it's Lepage. When Lepage Bakeries was sold to Flowers Foods in 2012, the company had \$166 million in annual sales, 550 employees and three plants. As a top executive at the bakery, Lepage was a strong advocate for issues such as equal pay, paid parental leave and diversified management teams — policies that were pioneering at one time but standardized at Lepage Bakeries.

Rob Lalka, executive director of Tulane's Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, thanked Albert Lepage for choosing this initiative for his latest gift to Tulane.

"This commitment is yet another powerful way that Albert's generosity will advance equity initiatives within the Freeman School," said Lalka, who also is the Albert R. Lepage Professor in Business. "This gift allows us to celebrate faculty who are making equity a true focus of their research and courses, and it will encourage all of our faculty to consider new ways to make equity integral to their work. I am grateful

for the good that this gift will do — first inside our classrooms, then with impacts far beyond them.”

Although Lepage’s teaching award is a new incentive for faculty, the business school is already laser-focused on EDI issues. In March the Lepage Center led a three-day workshop with multiple Tulane and community partners called [“Count the Costs Research Weekend,”](#) which worked to find solutions to the costly barriers that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) entrepreneurs face, as detailed by the [2020 Greater New Orleans Startup Report](#). After reviewing proposals from the weekend’s participants, the Lepage Center awarded research grants totaling \$120,000 to six projects, all of which aim to reduce racial disparities in areas ranging from entrepreneurship and homeownership to health care and criminal justice.

After graduating from Tulane with a master’s degree in business administration in 1971, Albert Lepage joined the family business in Maine, becoming its president in 1978, its chairman in 1983 and its co-chair in 2012. He retired in 2014.

Lepage’s extensive generosity toward the business school includes \$12.5 million to establish the Lepage Center in 2015. He serves on the Aldrich Society Board and the Business School Council and was a member of the search committee that helped select the school’s new dean, [Paulo Goes](#). He also regularly participates as a judge of the annual Tulane Business Model Competition.

Lepage has received numerous honors from the business school, including its Outstanding Alumnus Award in 2006 and its Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2011. This year he was inducted into the Paul Tulane Society, which honors individuals and organizations that have donated \$1 million or more to the university.

--Patrick J. Davis