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Bayou Classic Announces 2026 Cultural Ambassadors to Celebrate Louisiana's Art, Food and Heritage

Internationally acclaimed artists Don Cincone and Daryl Triplett and Food Network champion Chef Niema DiGrazia to serve as ambassadors, bringing Bayou Classic traditions to communities across Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS – The Bayou Classic is expanding its celebration of Louisiana's rich culture and heritage with the announcement of three Cultural Ambassadors for the 53rd Annual Bayou Classic: internationally recognized artist **Don Cincone**, visual artist **Daryl Triplett** and award-winning chef and Food Network champion **Niema DiGrazia**.

Representing communities across Louisiana, the ambassadors will help build excitement for the annual rivalry between Grambling State University and Southern University, using their talents, community connections and social media platforms to promote the Bayou Classic and its longstanding traditions.

The initiative celebrates the cultural significance of the Bayou Classic beyond the football field, recognizing the contributions of Louisiana artists, chefs and cultural leaders who help preserve and share the state's unique identity.

"For more than five decades, the Bayou Classic has been about much more than football. It is a celebration of our culture, our communities and the incredible talent that makes Louisiana special," said Dottie Belletto, President and CEO of the New Orleans Convention Company, Inc. (NOCCI), the management firm of the Bayou Classic. "Our Cultural Ambassadors represent the creativity, heritage and pride that define this event. We are excited to have them share the Bayou Classic story with their communities and audiences across the state and beyond."

Meet the 2026 Bayou Classic Cultural Ambassadors

Don Cincone | International Artist | West Monroe, Louisiana

With a remarkable artistic career spanning more than eight decades, Don Cincone is an internationally recognized artist whose work reflects the intersection of faith, history, culture and the human experience.

Raised in Alto, Louisiana, Cincone developed his artistic perspective through the values and stories of his community. His work has been exhibited in museums and galleries throughout Louisiana and beyond, including the Masur Museum of Art, the Southern University Museum of Art and the African American Museum of Dallas.

A recipient of the Italian Medal of Merit for Culture and Art and the NAACP Humanitarian Award, Cincone has dedicated his life to using art as a means of connection, understanding and inspiration. In 2026, his work was celebrated through a retrospective exhibition at the Biedenharn Museum and Gardens in Monroe.

Cincone also has an existing connection to the Bayou Classic, having participated in a Bayou Classic kickoff reception and art exhibition in 2017.

As a Cultural Ambassador, Cincone will help share the Bayou Classic's legacy of history, heritage and community through his artistic platform and connections throughout Northeast Louisiana.

Daryl Triplett | Visual Artist | Monroe, Louisiana

Monroe-based visual artist Daryl Triplett brings a distinctive creative perspective to the Bayou Classic, producing multidimensional works inspired by music, cultural heritage and personal experiences.

His art explores the connections between creativity, identity and community, drawing inspiration from the cultural traditions that shape Louisiana and the broader African American experience.

Triplett has participated in exhibitions and cultural programs throughout the region, including collaborative presentations with Don Cincone. His work reflects a commitment to storytelling through visual art and creating meaningful connections among diverse audiences.

As a Cultural Ambassador, Triplett will use his artistic voice and community relationships to celebrate the Bayou Classic and engage audiences across Northeast Louisiana.

Chef Niema DiGrazia | Culinary Ambassador | Shreveport, Louisiana

Award-winning international chef, restaurateur and Food Network champion Chef Niema DiGrazia will serve as the Bayou Classic's Culinary Ambassador, celebrating the powerful connection between food, culture and community.

Born in Sierra Leone and based in Shreveport, DiGrazia is the founder of Niema's West African & Caribbean Cuisine, where she blends the bold flavors of West Africa, the Caribbean and the American South.

Her culinary career has earned national recognition, including a victory on Food Network's *Beat Bobby Flay* and an appearance on the 2026 ESSENCE Festival of Culture Food & Wine Stage in New Orleans.

DiGrazia will bring her culinary talents and cultural storytelling to the Bayou Classic celebration, beginning with a special Bayou Classic Alumni Brunch and Trophy Roadshow on Sunday, October 18, at her new flagship restaurant in downtown Shreveport.

The event, part of the restaurant's October 16–18 grand opening celebration, will welcome Grambling State and Southern University alumni, Bayou Classic supporters and the general public for an experience celebrating food, culture and HBCU traditions.

"Being named Culinary Ambassador for the 2026 Bayou Classic is an incredible honor," said Chef Niema DiGrazia. "Bayou Classic represents generations of culture, excellence, tradition and community. To bring that energy to Shreveport as we celebrate the opening of our restaurant makes this moment even more meaningful."

Bringing the Bayou Classic to Communities Across Louisiana

Throughout the 2026 Bayou Classic season, the Cultural Ambassadors will serve as community voices for the event, promoting Bayou Classic activities in their hometowns, engaging their local networks and sharing content through their social media platforms.

The initiative reflects the Bayou Classic's commitment to connecting communities across Louisiana while celebrating the state's contributions to art, cuisine, music, education and African American culture.

"Our ambassadors remind us that the Bayou Classic belongs to communities throughout Louisiana," added Belletto. "Whether through a painting that tells our history, a creative expression that connects generations or a meal that brings people together, each ambassador represents the culture and traditions that make the Bayou Classic so meaningful."

The 53rd Annual Bayou Classic will take place Saturday, November 28, 2026, at 1 p.m. in the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans, featuring the historic rivalry between Grambling State University and Southern University.

For more information about the Bayou Classic, including tickets and the full schedule of events, visit www.mybayouclassic.com.

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ABOUT BAYOU CLASSIC

Celebrating its 53rd year, the Bayou Classic continues to uphold its legacy as a symbol of excellence and camaraderie within the HBCU community. Year after year, fans gather in New Orleans over Thanksgiving weekend to witness the thrilling football matchup between Southern University and Grambling State University, accompanied by the electrifying Battle of the Bands

& Greek Show and the highly anticipated halftime show featuring two of the greatest marching bands in the nation. For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.mybayouclassic.com.

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