The University’s annual spring Commencement is always a time filled with traditions and celebrations. This year, in honor of the 50th anniversary, the graduates shared their special day with many alumni who came to campus to participate in the ceremony.

“This was a wonderful Commencement. . . . We were able to celebrate the Commencement of the Class of 2007, and bring back alumni from each of the 50 years of the University and then a contingent of alumni from the first class of 1957,” said President Walter Harrison. “For me, this was really the perfect way to celebrate the 50th anniversary.”

Eight members of the Class of 1957, dressed in golden robes and mortarboards, were immediately christened the “Golden Hawks” by President Harrison. Alumni class representatives, wearing traditional black regalia and gold medallions showing their class years, led off the Commencement procession. Also included were graduates from the University’s founding schools—Hartford Art School, the Hartt College of Music, and the original Hillyer College—from as far back as 1945.

Alumni were also featured as the recipients of several honorary degrees and the Distinguished Alumni Award.

Kent McCray ‘51, a television industry pioneer who produced such legendary series as Bonanza and Little House on the Prairie, received an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts. George Gentile ’59, ’69, retired chair of Gerber Scientific, received an honorary Doctor of Commercial Science. Liane Hansen, host of National Public Radio’s Weekend Edition Sunday, was the Commencement speaker; her wife, Susan McCray (right), reads his citation to the audience.

“Don’t wait for the world to change. Work to change it. Remember, there are those who make things happen, those who watch what happens, and those who ask, ‘What happened?’ Which do you want to be?”

A posthumous honorary Doctor of Music was awarded to the late Jackie McLean, internationally acclaimed jazz saxophonist and founder of the Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz at The Hartt School, who died in 2006. His wife, Dollie McLean, received an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts in recognition of her work as the founding executive director of The Artists Collective in Hartford.

Robert N. Davis ’75, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, received the 2007 Distinguished Alumni Award. Davis was appointed by President George W. Bush in 2004 to a 15-year term on the court following a distinguished career as a law professor.

The 2007 faculty awards went to Regina Miller, professor of early childhood education; Farhad Rassekh, professor of economics; Harry Workman, professor of chemistry and acting dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; and Howard Mayer, associate professor of English.

Three graduating students—Joshua Magee, David Spiro, and Roberto Scata—were recognized with special awards for their outstanding undergraduate achievements. Spiro received the John G. Martin Scholarship, which provides two years of study for a master’s degree at Oxford University in England.

For video clips of President Harrison, the honorary degree recipients, the ceremony, and some of the alumni class representatives as well as more photos from the day, please visit the online Observer special edition for the 50th Commencement at www.hartford.edu/observer.