

HANDCRAFTED LEGACY

By Tom Schott

A couple of days before the December 2021 Purdue Global commencement in West Lafayette, Michael Lorenz spotted pieces of the university mace broken and discarded in a trash can.

Lorenz, Purdue Global's vice president of strategy and academic operations and registrar, decided to take a stab at repairing the damaged wood staff that is carried by the mace-bearer, who leads the chancellor and other dignitaries onto the stage at graduation ceremonies.

"In the end, there was just no fixing it," says Lorenz, a self-described amateur woodworker. "A new mace would cost us several thousand dollars. I thought that was money better spent on students, and I would try to make one. I wasn't sure what I was getting into, but I've kind of tinkered with woodworking all my life in some way or another."

Lorenz went to work—measuring, sawing, shaping, and assembling, all with a purpose—and the new mace made its first appearance at the May 2022 commencement in Indianapolis.

The new mace consists of 18 segments, representing Purdue Global's founding in 2018. Lorenz made it entirely from locally sourced woods, symbolizing the university's Indiana heritage. One section is composed of layers of different woods, evoking the diversity of students, faculty, and staff that is a hallmark of the institution and its mission.

Lorenz refurbished three pieces of the previous mace to use in the new one, a reminder of Purdue Global's legacy, which traces its roots to the American Institute of Commerce, a postsecondary school that opened in 1937 to provide training for underserved job seekers in a nation still reeling from the Great Depression.

"I wanted to infuse it with some kind of meaning because maces always seem to be imbued with symbolism," Lorenz says. "Another goal was to make something that felt good to carry, unlike the previous one, which was heavy and unbalanced. A mace is traditionally a medieval weapon, and any good weapon is balanced properly. I also made a choice to leave the wood unfinished, just because I personally like the feel of wood, and not varnish it."

Total cost of the project: "Probably \$45," Lorenz says.

The tradition of the mace originates from medieval times in England when it was carried by bishops of the church into battle as a protective device. Later, the mace was carried by sergeants-at-arms who were bodyguards of kings and others of high rank. Legislative bodies, such as the U.S. House of Representatives and the British Parliament, also adopted the ceremonial mace as part of the pomp and circumstance associated with the beginning of meetings.

Many universities use a mace to symbolize the importance of commencement and as acknowledgment of the academic process.

“There is a lot of Purdue legacy in my family,” says Lorenz, noting that his father and his father’s parents were all Purdue alumni. “It is nice to have added something to the Purdue Global story beyond working for the university.”

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