



## On Commencements

*Ginger Golz*

Students with mobility impairment, such as those using wheelchairs, and visually impaired students had no choice but to be escorted across the stage in E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall during their commencement ceremonies, lest they tip off the edge. The facility's design long preceded accessibility standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Until about 2012, anyone seated on stage who could not navigate stairs had to take the elevator to a different floor in order to gain restroom access. Students using wheelchairs were assigned an assistant commencement marshal to accompany them throughout the ceremony. Because candidate check-in occurred in the upper Goodrich Lobby for the processional, from the backstage and down into orchestra seating those using wheelchairs had to exit the building, go around outside—regardless of weather—and re-enter through the stage cargo area.

Some members of the stage party at commencement

were pranksters—Vice President, General Counsel, and Secretary of the Board of Trustees Ted Mallo particularly. Among Mr. Mallo's pranks were filling another's commencement program—which bore the member's name and was placed to mark each member's seat—with cookies, taping the program shut, or securing the program to the chair. Ted had saved a dead centipede and presented it to me in my role as building coordinator for Buchtel Hall. I returned the favor one semester by securing the centipede to Ted's commencement program.

One of the most memorable emergencies during a commencement ceremony occurred when the student vocalist failed to arrive to sing the National Anthem, America the Beautiful, and the University of Akron's Alma Mater. My recommendation for instrumental music only was overruled because Honors College Dean Dale Mugler stepped in to perform them—admirably, I might add.