

31st & Pearl

Why We Write

In a play on the words constituting the title of Frank Capra's famous video series about America's participation in World War II, the USMNEWS.net readers whose words are printed in [Wag the Dog Redux?](#) show just why USMNEWS.net's reporting and editorial staffers are so dedicated to their respective jobs. We write because by doing so we have opened up both USM's b-school, and USM as a whole, like never before. As a result, the institution and the divisions that constitute it are more predictable than ever before. USMNEWS.net editorialist Duane Cobb proved that point once again with his [editorial column](#) preceding Martha Saunders' major announcement that came yesterday. Our "avid" readers, like those from the first link above, drive that point home once again through the words of their essays and letters.

Our readers' ability to *quickly* and accurately assess the situation was driven home just the other day, with the release of Ed Kemp's [article](#) in the 11-Mar-09 issue of *The Hattiesburg American* entitled "Majority of anonymous gift will support scholarships" (inserted below). There Kemp explains that one of the goals of the "strategic initiatives" is the "creat[ion of] a climate for academic success," which is just what the readers refer to above as efforts to retain students at USM. Saunders, to the dismay of many USM faculty like history professor William Scarborough, seems to have tunnel vision with respect to this particular "initiative."

Kemp's article goes on to include "image development" as part of Saunders' laundry list of strategic initiatives. With a multi-million dollar budget shortfall, "image development" is the last thing USM should be concerning itself with. Saunders also lets us know that the USM Foundation will "handle" the donation. We're just not sure our definition of "handle" comports with hers. We think *not*. Assuming the donation is real, there may soon be only *half of it left* when USM Foundation staffers get through investing it on the gyrating stock market, especially given CoB BBER director William Gunther's proclamation that the current economic/financial crisis is 90% psychology and 10% economics. We just

aren't sure the USM Foundation employs enough psychologists to "handle" the task of managing \$6 million.

Finally, Kemp does clue us all in to the fact that private contributions to USM dropped by 40.6% between 2007 and 2008 (i.e., they dropped from \$6.4 million to \$3.8 million). This, and the fact that USM is facing budget cuts ranging from \$4.75 million to \$14.75 million, according to Kemp, shows the acumen of our writers and readers. First, our reader's speculation about cuts ranging from \$8 to \$12 million squares nicely with Kemp's reported range. Second, wouldn't you expect a "fake" (untraceable) donation to come, if one would come, precisely when the institution seems to be coming apart at the financial seams? You would, particularly when the institution is led by someone who seems to live and breathe "image development."

This is why we write. We hope the predictability of the institution (USM) that has resulted has made your life easier. If you are affiliated with another institution, we hope the lessons learned from USM's b-school have benefitted you, at least in some small way, in your day-to-day professional dealings at your home base.

31st & Pearl is a series housed at usmnews.net that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.

Majority of anonymous gift will fund scholarships

BY ED KEMP • MARCH 11, 2009

The University of Southern Mississippi presented some good financial news Tuesday - a change from the somber, belt-tightening announcements of the last few months.

From the steps of the Thad Cochran Center, President Martha Saunders announced a \$6 million donation from an anonymous source.

"This is the largest, single cash gift ever received by the university," Saunders told a crowd of students, faculty and staff.

"This is a transformational gift for our university, and one for which we are deeply grateful," she later added.

The gift will be broken down into \$5 million for scholarships, with the remaining \$1 million aimed toward university's strategic initiatives.

Those initiatives include creating a climate for academic success, making connections with the community, image development and creating a culture of healthy minds, bodies and campuses.

Saunders said the USM Foundation, which will handle the donation, will meet Thursday to determine an investment strategy for scholarships. A committee will determine how to best invest \$5 million so that it will continue to generate scholarship money, she said.

The committee also will discuss how to use the \$1 million designated for strategic initiatives. Money may be spent on increasing student retention, broadening distance learning programs and funding external research, depending on opportunities available, she said.

"We have set metrics," Saunders said. "We know when the needle's moving, and we will look at some ways to ... stimulate our strategic initiatives."

Saunders said she was not at liberty to answer questions concerning the giver's identity or motivation. She said the donor made the initial contact.

The gift comes during a troubling economic period that has seen the university scramble to combat \$4.75 million in state budget cuts for fiscal year 2008 and \$10 million in anticipated cuts for 2009.

Donations also have been waning, from \$6.4 million in 2007 to \$3.8 million last year.

Vice President for Advancement David Wolf said he was surprised by the gift amount - one that exceeds by six-fold the previous largest gift received during his 13-month tenure as fundraising director.

However, Wolf added he is hardly shocked that people recognize Southern Miss' value for the region.

"I think this is a testament that someone out there realizes that Southern Miss makes an impact," he said.