

# 31<sup>st</sup> & Pearl

## Does President Saunders Need a Larger Plane?

One of the greatest scrolls in the history of USMNEWS.net occurred on 16-Sept-2010, announcing all of the individuals who traveled with USM president Martha Saunders aboard “USM air” to Omaha, Nebraska, in June of 2009 for a USM baseball game. A facsimile of that scroll, containing a partial list of the passengers for that trip, appears below. The names run from Saunders to Chad and Jack Driskell, Joe Bailey, Doug Rouse, Joe and Connie Morgan, Bob Pierce, Johnny Atherton, Jay McDowell, Billy Hewes, Richard Giannini, Johnny Dupree and John Brown. If you’re counting, that’s 14 passengers – so many the pilots (yes, both of them) had to make two trips from Mississippi to Nebraska to get them all to the game. USMNEWS.net estimates that the entire episode cost Mississippi taxpayers more than \$72,000. Again, if you’re counting, that’s probably the salary of Mark Clark, the Greek and Latin professor Saunders “canned” back on 1-Sept-2010.

President Saunders, Chad Driskell, Joe Bailey, Jack Driskell, Doug Rouse, Joe and Connie Morgan, Bob Pierce,

For a complete look at the USMNEWS.net report on the matter, click [here](#). The trip took place in mid-June-2009, just days before Father’s Day that year. That must have made it a super-nice trip for Chad Driskell, Saunders’ executive assistant. One would assume Jack is Chad’s young son. The linked report indicates that Joe Bailey is Saunders’ husband, and that Johnny Dupree was, and still is, the Hattiesburg mayor. Joe Morgan is, of course, the former USM chief financial officer who resigned under a cloud just a few weeks ago. He was demoted to a position with alumni affairs, though Saunders allowed him to retain his hefty CFO salary, even though religion professor Daniel Capper had to be fired recently in order to allow the university to survive.

John Brown is a staffer in the mayor’s office, though he formerly reported for *WDAM-TV News* for quite awhile. One would guess he did a story or two on misuse of tax dollars by public officials during his time there. Giannini was, and still is, USM’s athletics director. Again, he should have traveled with the team to Omaha, not with Saunders. Rouse is a local doctor who also serves on the Mississippi IHL Board. Is he independent in that role? It’s difficult to say, especially now. One presumes that Billy Hewes is the same staunch supporter of

former USM president Shelby Thames who irritated USM faculty for several years during that administration. If memory serves, he has made a number of controversial public comments around Gulfport. Isn't he also the one who asked Saunders about her religious denomination during an official, public meeting that was part of Saunders' on-campus interview about three years ago? Many call Pierce a Saunders sycophant. He did just get a huge promotion and raise, even though Saunders had to drastically cut USM's philosophy department so that USM would have an honest shot at making it another 100 years.

The list goes on. It should be clear, then, that Saunders not only needs the Beechcraft King Air 200 that she has now, she may require a second. Of course, a larger plane would do the trick as well. It's time for USM to tighten its belt again so that this "strategic project" can be entertained – we wouldn't want to see the university miss out again on that elusive multi-million dollar gift. Which USM unit wants to step up and make this happen? How about psychology? Can't the psychologists make due with four or five fewer faculty? We've done the math – this deal will affect only 254.3 student majors. It's a no brainer.

---

*31st & Pearl is a series housed at [usmnews.net](http://usmnews.net) that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB from a variety of columnists.*