

# BMOC

## *Scianna Throws Down Gauntlet on IHL Search Process*

USM b-school benefactor Chuck Scianna was clearly the proverbial “big man on campus” at USM on 19-Sept-2012. As regular readers of USMNEWS.net likely realize, 19-Sept-2012 was the day the Mississippi IHL Board conducted *Campus Listening Sessions*, on both the Hattiesburg and Long Beach campuses of USM, aimed at assisting the IHL in selecting the best available candidate to replace Martha Saunders as president of USM. Although large in stature, the BMOC tag placed on Scianna by some comes from his vigorous criticism of the IHL’s job in retaining good presidents at Mississippi’s eight public universities, and particularly at USM, and not from his imposing figure. During the faculty and staff listening session, Scianna, who donated about \$5 million to USM in 2011-12, delivered the following statement:

“I’m Chuck Scianna, and I want to speak to all you . . . since faculty and staff are here, and the [IHL] Board, I’d like to speak to you as an investor [in USM], and I’d like to thank all of the faculty and staff. You’re the reason I invested in the University of Southern Mississippi. It’s not just because I was a student here. It’s because of you, and without you there’s nothing for me to invest in. The students here are the customers. I think it’s important for the [IHL] Board to remember that it’s not a contribution, it’s not a donation. We in the private sector today, when we look at putting money places, we’ve got a gillion requests. This is a state institution. Our mentality is, ‘let the state take care of it . . . let taxpayers take care of it . . . why do you need my money? . . . why shouldn’t it go to Salvation Army? . . . why shouldn’t it go to some of these other altruistic 501-Cs? . . . why should it go back to a state institution?’ It’s because of the return on the investment – what it does for the state, what it does for the students, what it puts back into the community. It gets back more than the six-tenths of one percent, or 60 basis points, that I got on my portfolio last year. It’s an immeasurable return. But I think it’s incumbent on all of us to remember that when investors invest, we invest in the management team. And, we have had turnover here in the state, and I think the [IHL] Board should consider that. When I made the investment [in the CoB], the investment was made based on negotiations with individuals who made certain commitments to me, and, in my opinion, they’re in breach because they’re no longer here [at USM, and] they’re not going to honor the commitments. So, it’s important for us to have this continuity, [and] to have somebody [as president] that’s going to support the faculty, because what [former USM president] Martha [Saunders] sold to me was you [faculty and staff]. She didn’t sell these buildings and this campus, because it can’t do anything for the students. She sold you [faculty and staff] to me. So did [former CoB dean] Lance Nail, so that’s important for all of us to remember, that you [faculty and staff] are what we’ve got to sell. So, thanks again . . . thanks for your commitment. I know you’re all underpaid, and believe me, as a consumer of the product that you produce, I appreciate what you do and you put out an excellent product. Thanks.”

Scianna’s remarks were, not unexpectedly, met with resounding applause from the audience of faculty and staff (and others) who attended the listening session. Scianna had said what most USM faculty and staff in attendance were thinking, but could not, or would not, articulate themselves. In doing so, he threw down a gauntlet before the IHL Board. Only time will tell if USM faculty leaders, such as those in the faculty senate, will pick it up and carry it across the finish line.