

## Duke Resigns from USM Directorship

HATTIESBURG – According to Ed Kemp’s 22-June-2012 [report for](#) *The Hattiesburg American*, after only 2 years at the helm, Rick Duke, the director of USM’s Trent Lott Center, is resigning his post. Duke’s departure continues a string of resignations from USM during the 2011-12 academic year, including that of USM president Martha Saunders, who is moving to the faculty at USM’s Long Beach campus.



*Rick Duke*

Long-time followers of USM will likely notice some of the intriguing parts to Kemp’s report, at least according to sources. One, Duke gave up a directorship at Georgia Tech to come to USM’s Lott Center, so a resignation after just two years seems curious to some. Two, Duke’s comments to Kemp about economic development and USM are strange. According to Duke,

“We’re here promoting what Southern Miss economic development is all about. Before I came, Southern Miss really wasn’t proactively communicating economic development. We are now.”

After the hyper-focus on economic development that occurred under former USM president Shelby Thames’ administration (2002-07), and one that continues to the present day, sources say that long-time followers of USM will find Duke’s comment above bizarre. Three, Duke’s lack of direction, indicating that he “. . . may become a graduate student for a semester and take it from there,” is quite odd, to sources at least, particularly given his age (60). That he also mentions not having any formal education in economics or environmental planning/design, areas of focus for the Lott Center, only adds fuel to just how odd Duke’s comments about his future must be to *THA* readers. Four, [the fact](#) that College of Health dean [Michael Forster](#) lauds Duke, saying he (Forster) was disappointed [to see](#) Duke leave USM, and referring to Duke [as a](#) “big picture guy,” likely provides, to some readers, an indication that Duke’s presence, not his absence, is harmful to USM and Mississippi taxpayers in some way.

Stay tuned to USMNEWS.net for what may come next as the final days of the Saunders administration (2007-12) unfold.