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Is USM Hiding Something about the Parking Garage?

HATTIESBURG – As David Tisdale's USM <u>presser points out</u>, a celebratory opening of USM's new five-story parking garage – a structure capable of accommodating 1,200 vehicles – occurred on the morning of 7-April-2011, complete with USM president Martha Saunders and USM vice president of student affairs Joe Paul driving an antique vehicle through a yellow ribbon to mark the occasion (see Steve Rouse's photo below).



According to Tisdale, the new open-zone garage, which was designed by Albert & Associates Architects of Hattiesburg, and built by Hattiesburg's Finlo Construction (see license plate on antique car above) and L&A Construction, includes security lighting, handicapped spaces, 10 code blue phones, more than 50 video cameras, a fire monitoring system, and an elevator. Tisdale also notes that this new garage is the first multi-level parking facility on a university campus in Mississippi.

Perhaps the most intriguing item in Tisdale's story pertains to the financing details of the new structure. According to Tisdale, "[v]ehicle registration fees fund the construction cost of the \$15.5 million structure, financed through the university's first public/private third party construction partnership, Eagle Parking LLC. This developer consortium is composed of five local companies and a consultant." A USMNEWS.net investigation, however, uncovered some interesting details about the corporation behind the financing of the new structure.

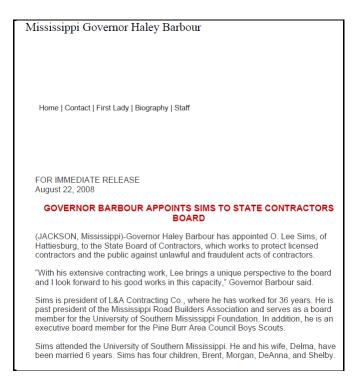
The insert below contains information obtained from the Mississippi Secretary of State's office (SoS-MS). It shows that an LLC under the name mentioned above was formed on 12-January-09, but that entity has since changed its name to "Eagle Parking & Development, LLC." Also of interest is the name of the LLC's "registered agent" – Lee Sims, of Sims Road in Hattiesburg.

SE SE	CRETARY OF STATE Business Services Search Results Include Fil	ings Through 04/04/2011 12:00 AM
Search By Business Name By Business ID	Date: 4/10/2011 <u>View Filed Doct</u> Name History	i <u>ments</u>
By Officer Name By Registered Agent New Corporations Annual Report File Online Verification	Name Eagle Parking & Development, LLC Eagle Parking LLC	Name Type Legal Prev Legal
Verify Certification Online Orders Rearister for Online Orders Order Good Standing Fee Schedules Corporations Limited Partnerships Limited Liability Partnerships Limited Liability Companies Miscellaneous	Limited Liability Company - Domest Business ID: Status: Creation Date: Dissolve Date: State of Incorporation: Principal Office Address: Listing Address:	ic - Information 943371 Good Standing 1/12/2009 1/11/2029 MS No Address No Address
Registered Agents Download Corporate Forms and Instructions Look Up an SIC Contact Contact	Registered Agent Agent Name: Office Address: Mailing Address:	<u>Sims. Lee</u> 100 Sims Road, PO Box 16749 Hattiesburg MS 3940-46749
Business	Officers & Directors	

Another document obtained from the SoS-MS by USMNEWS.net indicates that the LLC's name change occurred on 3-May-2010, about one year ago. That document is inserted below.

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The insert below is a copy of a press release from Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour's office dated 22-August-08. It announces the appointment of Hattiesburg's Lee Sims to the State Board of Contractors.



Barbour's presser also indicates that Sims is the president of **L&A Contracting** in Hattiesburg, and that he served, at that time at least, as a member of the USM Foundation Board. One additional document obtained from SoS-MS, which is inserted below, indicates that Sims is the principal of another Mississippi LLC – Southern Concrete Pumping.



The final insert in this particular report is a copy of Ray Sims' obituary (see below). As the insert states, Ray was the chairman of the board of **L&A Contracting**. It also notes that one of Ray's two surviving sons is Lee Sims.

Obituary

Ray A. Sims Sr. | Visit Guest Book

Ray A. Sims, Sr.

Services will be held at 2:00 p.m. Friday at Temple Baptist Church for Mr. Ray A. Sims, Sr. age 79, of Hattiesburg. Mr. Sims died Tuesday, May 11, 2010 at his residence. Entombment will be in Roseland Park Mausoleum. He was Chairman of The Board of L & A Contracting Co. A member of Temple Baptist Church. He was preceded by his wife, JoAnne Sims, Survived by 2 sons Lee Sims and Ray Sims, Jr. both of Hattiesburg; 2 daughters Cindy Sutherland and Janet Blanton both of Hattiesburg. 12 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren. Visitation will be 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. Thursday at Hulett-Winstead Funeral Home in Hattiesburg, MS. Memorials may be made to Ray & JoAnne Sims Presidential Fund USM Foundation.

Long-time followers of USMNEWS.net will recognize Ray Sims as the individual who sold the old Albertson's building to USM, during the Shelby F. Thames administration (2002-07), for use as a new nursing school that the Thames administration was planning at that time. That controversial saga, wherein USM paid Sims \$1.2 million for the facility, is recounted quite well <u>here</u>. Sources tell USMNEWS.net that the current parking garage situation is potentially as controversial as the Albertson's saga. It appears that the parking garage plan is one that may result in a massive transfer of wealth – in this case from past, current and future USM students – to the Sims family of Hattiesburg.