

CoB Flashback: May 7, 2003

In May of 2003 USM's business school was known as the "College of Business and Economic Development." The name had changed from "College of Business Administration" back in January of 2003, when then-USM President Shelby Thames reorganized the University and fired all of its deans. That included CBED Dean William Gunther, who was set to complete his 2002-03 contract and be out of office by June 30, 2003.

Gunther, however, did not want to leave without a fight. And, he (Gunther) had some powerful allies in the CBED's Business Advisory Council, an external constituency group that supported the CBED financially. Fifteen members of that group had only recently contributed \$150,000 to begin [architectural planning and conceptual design work](#) for a new business school building at USM. That effort was led by L.D. Brinkman of Kerrville, Texas, and fast-food magnate Gene Carlisle of Memphis, Tennessee. Gunther and the BAC used the funds to pay a Memphis-based architectural firm -- the Hnedak-Bobo Group -- for design work on the new business school facility. Meanwhile, Gunther and various BAC members reportedly toured business schools around the country (e.g., TCU, University of Denver) using Brinkman's private jet.

The BAC was fond of Gunther. Some say that is putting it mildly. Gunther and the group had been "jet-setting" around the country, touring California vineyards and the like, during Gunther's term (1998-2003) as dean. And as of May 7, 2003, Thames had not named a new dean for USM's CBED. Sensing an opening, Gunther and some in the BAC struck via [a press conference](#) in USM's Aubrey K. Lucas Administration Building. In addition to Gunther, presentations were made by CBED financial supporters Lou Ann Poynter of Hattiesburg and others. At the center of the day's events was Carlisle, who pledged the majority of a \$5 million gift (to support a new business school building and new endowed professorships in business) that was announced during that press event. Throughout the press conference, Carlisle's emotions ran wild. At times it was difficult to decipher his speech through all of the tears, which were flowing from Carlisle's eyes like water over Niagara Falls.

Like water off a duck's back, Thames seemed unfazed by the whole show. By the end of it all, he was able to claim about as much credit for the day as Gunther had, and it had all come much easier to him (Thames). Many in the CBED of 2003 doubted that any of the pledged donations would ever come to fruition, at least not in a way that promoted a new business school building and/or new business professorships. Time has only worked to support those who doubted the veracity of the day's events. Today's CoB seems no closer to a new business school facility than the CBED of May 2003 was, and it's possible that the College Lance Nail inherits on July 1, 2008 is even further from that goal than was the case of the CBED that former Dean Harold Doty inherited in July of 2003.

Whatever became of Carlisle's planned multi-million dollar contribution to USM's College of Business and Economic Development? No one outside of the USM Foundation knows for sure, but some have a pretty good idea. In 2004, at least two major events surrounding USM's football program occurred. The first of these was that the USM Athletic Department installed new Momentum Athletic Turf at Faulkner Field in M.M. Roberts Stadium. The second of these was that USM renamed Faulkner Field. In 2004 it became Carlisle-Faulkner Field at M.M. Roberts Stadium in honor of the [many financial contributions](#) to USM athletics made by Gene Carlisle, who reportedly funded much of the Momentum Turf project that same year.

Maybe Carlisle knew the May 2003 press conference was a big gamble that would find no middle ground, at least as far as Gunther's future as CBED dean was concerned. Maybe, on June 13, 2003, the day [Thames named Doty](#) as the CBED's new dean, Carlisle "cashed out" of his interests in the CBED and invested more heavily in his other love, that of USM athletics. With these two strong maybes it's no stretch to conclude that Thames outfoxed Gunther on May 7, 2003, and in more ways than one.