

Lucas, USM Honor Giannini with Terrace Naming

Interim USM President Seems to be Choosing Sides in Athletics Department Controversy

In one of his first acts as USM's [new interim president](#), Aubrey Lucas announced that he would [preside over the search](#) for a new athletics director to replace Richard Giannini, and that he would seek Giannini's advice in selecting that individual. In making this announcement, Lucas upset most, if not all, of those in the USM family who are supporting interim AD Jeff Hammond's candidacy for the permanent AD post. Next, on 3-May-2012, Lucas co-hosted [a tribute dinner](#) for Giannini, which included naming the south endzone suite at USM's M.M. Roberts Stadium the **Richard Giannini Touchdown Terrace**, thus permanently affixing Giannini's stamp on USM football (and USM athletics in general).



Tribute dinner coordinators unveil marker naming the south endzone suite at M.M. Roberts Stadium the Richard Giannini Touchdown Terrace.

According to WDAM-TV sports anchor Nathan Epstein, the dedication introduction announcement was made by Lucas, and that one of the dinner's coordinators, [Ed Langton](#), read [a letter of commendation](#) from Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant to the dinner guests in attendance, including [Mississippi Senator John Polk](#). For newer readers of USMNEWS.net, Langton [donated \\$200,000 to build the Centennial Gateway](#) at the main entrance of the USM campus.



Giannini delivers an emotional 'thank you' to guests gathered to honor his achievements over 13 years as USM AD, and to name the south endzone suite at M.M. Roberts Stadium the Richard Giannini Touchdown Terrace.

After the dinner, Langton, [the Grand Bank CEO](#), explained to Epstein that “[w]hat [dinner guests] heard [at the tribute dinner] are not to be talked about as things that are intangibles. It's all tangible. You look around and you can see the leadership, the vision, and the things [Richard Giannini] accomplished [as USM athletics director].” Epstein added that Giannini “is credited with gathering funds needed to build and renovate a number of the athletic facilities at Southern Miss, along with guiding a number of teams to success in his 13 years.”



USM supporter and tribute dinner co-coordinator Ed Langton speaks to WDAM-TV's Nathan Epstein about Richard Giannini's legacy as USM athletics director.



Former USM athletics director Richard Giannini speaks at recent tribute dinner in front of permanent marker describing his legacy and naming the south endzone suite at M.M. Roberts Stadium the Richard Giannini Touchdown Terrace.

Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Lucas' continued praise of Giannini throws a gauntlet of sorts down in the face of Saunders and those in the USM family who support [Saunders' preference](#) for the permanent AD position, interim AD Jeff Hammond. They also note that Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant's involvement in the tribute to Giannini is another slap at Saunders, given how easy it would have been for him to have had a letter commending Saunders read aloud, by either IHL commissioner Hank Bounds or IHL president Ed Blakeslee, at Saunders' resignation press conference back on 27-Apr-2012.