

Martha's 9

9 wishes for '09

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Happy New Year! I believe it's going to be a good one. We have a great university to serve, a thriving community to support (and that supports us) and the intellectual power of 16,000 minds to move us forward. For sure, good things can come from this place.

The writer, Mary South, and I are kindred spirits on the subject of looking at the bright side. She wrote:

"I'd better start by admitting I am an optimist - not your run-of-the-mill, happy-face Pollyanna-type. I'm Old School - an extreme optimist of the sort that went out of style around the time of Don Quixote."

As I look toward the possibilities for the New Year, my head is buzzing with ideas and projects to move us forward. Specifically, I offer the following:

Martha's 9 Wishes for '09:

1. Increased freshman retention rate.
 2. Increased graduation rate.
 3. A grand opening of the Trent Lott National Center of Excellence for Economic Development and Entrepreneurship
 4. External research funding in excess of \$100 million
 5. Increased private funding of \$1 million for scholarships.
 6. Funding for the first buildings on the Cross Creek campus.
 7. Raises for our employees.
 8. Positive national stories about our great university.
 9. Locked-down plans for our Centennial celebration in 2010.
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What an interesting list. Numbers 1 and 4 point toward Number 7, but certainly not like airplane payments – especially balloon payments – would. Number 2 is fine, but giving USM students a more positive experience while they are here would surely correlate to higher giving when they do graduate. Please see the regional examples of Ole Miss and Alabama.

We would have thought – by now – you would want Number 3 to go quietly away rather than cast more harsh light on it, but it is your list. Open it: how will it be funded, who will be in there, and what will they do? More empty buildings on Highway 49 are not an answer to anything.

Number 4 is a lofty goal for a school of USM's size. It will be even loftier in the current and coming economic climate. While Dr. Thames was severely criticized for

many things – many rightfully so – you need to treat funded research recipients well or they will find a school who will do so.

Number 5 is critical, but can you keep all of your charges' hands off that much money?

Number 8 may be likely, but it will probably come on the athletic front. Are you ready for that? A comeback season and an exciting Bowl win for Coach Fedora and you publicly have blogged nothing. USM plays and defeats Ole Miss in basketball and you are mum. Like it or not, here is your chance – for now – to walk on a national stage.

Numbers 6 and 9 are of less concern to people than you imagine. We understand you are obligated to care about Number 6. Check. Wouldn't these "big plans" for 2010 be easier if you take care of the past and current? Give more people things to be positive about and they will be. It is not all money, but no raises this year and little hope of raises next year while buying an airplane is not smart.

Time to get to work; put down the Christmas books and start working on making your wish list come true. Happy New Year!