

# Showing the Way

An Editorial from Susan Green-Lewis

Diane Stark and Sonya Varnell, one a *former* associate athletics director at USM and the other a *current* associate athletics director at USM, have filed complaints with the Mississippi Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The complaints allege that interim USM athletics director, Jeff Hammond, verbally harassed them on the job on multiple occasions over the past few months. In filing these complaints with the MEEOC, Stark and Varnell did not follow USM's policies and procedures. Let me repeat that. In filing these complaints with the MEEOC, neither Stark nor Varnell followed USM's policies and procedures. Having made, and then repeated, that point, let me add now that both of these individuals made the appropriate decision, and others at USM who find themselves victims of the tirades and malice of a USM administrator should follow their lead.

To understand why, let's assume that the policies and procedures in athletics are the same as those on the academic side of the ship, all of which are laid out in the USM Faculty Handbook. In that case, Stark and Varnell would have been directed to file a grievance as soon as Hammond's mistreatment of them began. That grievance, in each case, would have been filed with their superior. Of course, that superior is none other than Hammond. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Hammond would have concluded that their grievances were groundless. In that case, Stark and Varnell would have had to avail themselves of USM's appellate process. Their appeals of Hammond's decisions would have gone to Hammond's supervisor. That person is none other than USM president Martha Saunders, the same individual who has reportedly already stated, even before the MEEOC completes its investigations, that if anyone in athletics was yelled at by Hammond, that person (or those persons) probably deserved it. Any guesses as to how Saunders would've come down on the appeals? I thought so.

The grievance procedures at USM are as bad as a hot summer day in the South is long. Time and again readers of USMNEWS.net have encountered reports in the past that recount how one victim of administrative mobbing in USM's business college after another filed grievances against their administrative superiors in the CoB, only to have those very same administrators judge that those grievances were baseless. Time and again, central administrators at USM backed their mid-level management subordinates during the appeals process. Every single time, the victims of the mobbing had their due process, and their dignity, ground to dust by a Soviet-style justice system that has absolutely no place in institutions of higher learning. Yes, Stark and Varnell are showing us all the way. Those very same CoB faculty who fell victim to the administrative whims of the Harold Dotys and George Carters in the CoB's administration in years past would probably love to have a second chance at the gavel. My bet is that, if that second chance were somehow magically granted by a justice fairy, those CoBers would retain legal counsel and head straight to the MEEOC office in Jackson. Rarely if ever would the spine of the USM Faculty Handbook have been cracked by any of the victims from those days. Like Lewis and Clark, Stark and Varnell are blazing a grievance trail that others are going to have to follow in order to get a remedy for the tyrannical behavior that is so common from USM's administrative class.