

The Farm

News Briefs from Southern Miss

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Is Martha Spending Your Christmas Money?

Pockets of the USM campus are buzzing about [the new holiday commercial](#) that USM is now running on CNBC and (possibly) other cable television networks. The 30-second spot is linked above, though there is also a 1-minute [version that is available](#) via YouTube. The commercial shows a number of USM students, singing Christmas songs, who come to the front door of the USM president's mansion. They are greeted there by Martha Saunders and Joe Bailey, and a festive gathering ensues. Saunders is shown passing around Christmas cookies and sharing in the holiday cheer.

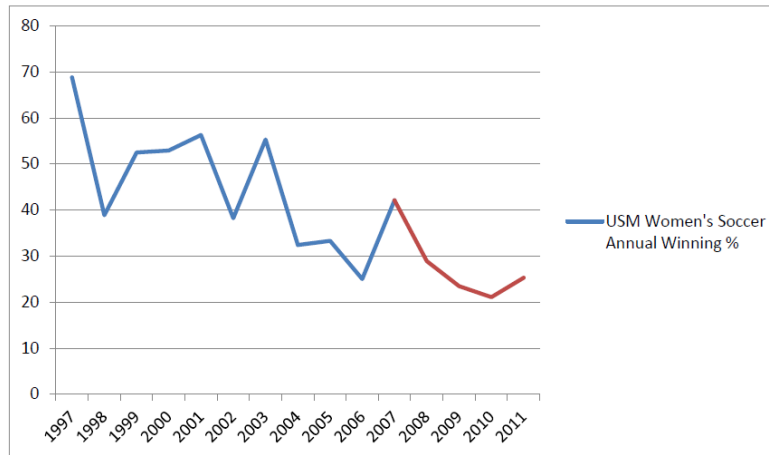


The commercial sends season's greetings from USM to viewers, meaning that air time and production costs were likely funded by Mississippi taxpayers. Of course, taxpayers are not credited anywhere in the television spot. Also missing from the spot is [a full view](#), or even [a quick glimpse](#), of the master bedroom suite in the president's mansion, which Saunders spent \$325,000 in university funds on renovating shortly after becoming USM's president back in 2007.

Thanks to Larry

After giving USM football fans a 33-19 record since the 2008 season, including an 11-2 record thus far in 2011, former USM head football coach Larry Fedora is heading off to take the reins at the University of North Carolina. Since Fedora's departure was announced earlier this month, many USM fans have been hitting the internet to say "thank you" to the coach who brought the C-USA championship back to USM for the first time since 2003. They are also thanking Fedora for the top 25 national ranking that his 2011 team has thus far produced, in addition to the unprecedented 11-win season.

Lost in the shuffle here is the dismal performance of USM's soccer program since USM president took the job in 2007. That year, she led the hiring of Scott Ebke, who has led that program down to the lowest depths it has seen in the history of women's soccer at USM. What Ebke has succeeded in doing to the USM soccer program is shown in the figure below, which tracks that program's winning percentage since its inception in the 1980s. Ebke's contribution to the historical record is shown in red.



As sources point out, had a USM faculty produced a similar result in terms of the academic side of things, he/she would have been denied tenure/promotion. Had any one of USM's academic programs been as bad, it likely would have been eliminated during the budget cuts of 2009 and 2010. Yet, somehow Ebke has managed to hang on firmly enough to his position that he continues [to Tweet away](#) about the pleasures of life as USM's head soccer coach. It seems, to some at least, that Ebke owes Fedora this holiday season for the cover that Fedora's unprecedented success has provided to him (Ebke) over the past four years.