

USM's Next Controversy?

A New Look at the Fraternity House Hazing Incident

Near the end of the 5-Sept-08 press conference regarding the recent fraternity house [hazing incident](#) on the campus of USM, a reporter informed USM officials that the mother of the hazing victim, Melanie Besancon of Waveland, [told her](#) (the reporter) that the Kappa Sigma fraternity event, during which the hazing episode occurred, also involved the USM chapter of Kappa Delta sorority. Without hesitation, both Joseph Paul, USM Vice President of Student Affairs, and Martha Saunders, USM President, denied the charge. Interestingly, this media comment was one of only two media comments or questions that Saunders addressed, either verbally or non-verbally. It is also interesting that part of Paul's response seemed more like a semantics exercise, as he indicated that he (Paul) had not seen the elder Besancon's statement in any of the media reports surrounding the events of Labor Day weekend at USM's Kappa Sigma fraternity house. Paul's alternative would have been to say that USM had investigated the charge levied by Besancon (via the reporter), and that there was no evidence to support it. It may have also been helpful had USMPD chief, Bob Hopkins, who was also present at the press conference, addressed this particular point of information. Neither happened.

As it stands now, the USM chapter of Kappa Sigma fraternity has been [disbanded](#), and the members have vacated their on-campus facility. And, no other USM-sanctioned group has been disciplined in any way, though Paul intimated at the press event that campus organizations are free to discipline any individual members found to have been involved in the Kappa Sigma gathering that left the younger Besancon in the intensive care unit at Forrest General Hospital for just under two weeks. She was held there to care for an enlarged liver that resulted from alcohol poisoning.

Even though there have not been any further reports from *The Hattiesburg American* or WDAM-TV, the local NBC television affiliate, reporters at USMNEWS.net have been looking into possible reasons why, assuming it was involved in the hazing episode in some way, the USM chapter of Kappa Delta sorority might have been protected by Paul and Saunders during the 5-Sept-08 press conference. In doing so, a [1-March-08 presser](#) by USM PR official, Jana Bryant, revealed some interesting information.



That presser announced the opening of **The Village** at USM, a \$20 million residence complex built on the Hattiesburg campus for members of sororities and women's athletic teams. Hosting the ribbon-cutting ceremony were Saunders and Paul, and the key guest participant was Bonnie Warren, a USM alumna who is also the National Kappa

Delta sorority President (Warren is the second person from the left in the photo above, right next to Saunders; Paul stands behind the podium). Warren is also the wife of Lawrence Warren (shown below with wife, Bonnie), owner and operator of Warren Paving (www.warrenpaving.com) in Hattiesburg.



Lawrence Warren is one of the leaders of what sources call a group of [local good 'ol boys](#) who are despised by many, if not most, USM faculty (see [USM Forum](#)) for their support of what many view as the disastrous Shelby [Thames administration](#) of USM (2002-07). Sources tell USMNEWS.net that Warren Paving earned "loads of money" from campus paving projects during the Thames administration, a consideration that might relate to Warren's decision to host what many USM faculty members have described as an "anti-faculty gathering" at his company at a point in time when the Thames administration seemed to be in critical condition (in terms of political support).

There is no doubt that any involvement of the Kappa Delta sorority in the Labor Day weekend hazing incident at USM would be more bad press for the 100 year old academic institution. With the punishment that Saunders et al. meted out against the Kappa Sigma fraternity, one would have to believe that any involvement of Kappa Delta sorority would lead to that organization's ouster as well. And while that event would be bad for USM, it would represent something more like an unmitigated disaster for Bonnie Warren, the National Kappa Delta Sorority President. And, while Bonnie Warren's local reputation would suffer a huge blow from KD involvement, Lawrence Warren's ability to serve as USM's paver-in-residence might also go by the wayside if any evidence of KD participation in the hazing episode were revealed.

Given the information included in this report, wouldn't one think it's about time that Melanie Besancon's statement, that the KD sorority was involved in the recent hazing episode, is further investigated?