

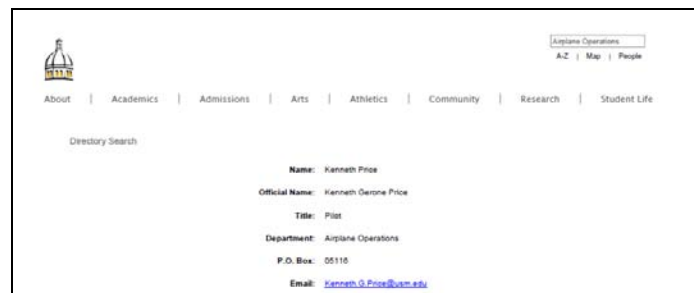
Updated 2-Nov-2010

The Martha Belle

More on what Maintaining Saunders' Airplane is Costing Taxpayers

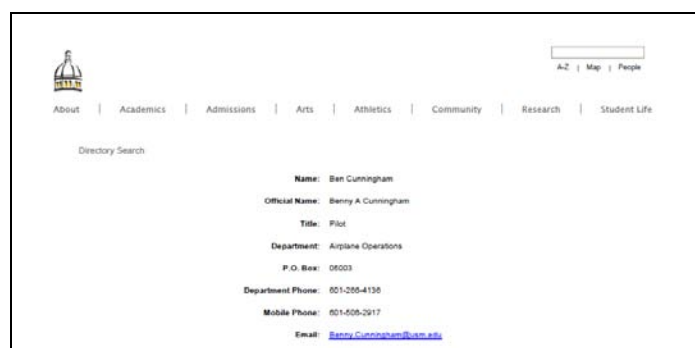
The volume of reports and editorials here at USMNEWS.net regarding USM president Martha Saunders' university airplane is already mindboggling, and yet the mountain keeps getting higher and higher in elevation. What USM provost Robert Lyman once said *may* be “an extravagance” is looking more and more like just that with each and every completed paragraph. This report examines a heretofore unexplored area concerning the USM Beechcraft King Air, jokingly referred to as “Air Farce One” by many in and around the so-called USM family. The USMNEWS.net [Mississippi Open Records Request series](#) on the USM plane has been providing screenshots of actual USM documents pertaining to use of the plane, including flight destinations, passengers, and pilots employed on the various junks. The growing list of pilots, which is the subject of this particular report, may surprise readers.

In defending USM's \$2 million lease of the twin-prop craft, Saunders occasionally remarks that the plane's pilot is a long-time USM employee. In doing so, she is most likely referring to Julian Allen, USM's associate vice president of research. Allen holds a pilot's license, and on many trips serves as one of the two pilots for Saunders and her travelling companions. As indicated, however, each flight requires two pilots, and Saunders' remarks are less remarkable when it comes to each person who has occupied that second near the nose of the plane. The inserts below show how USM classifies those pilots, like Kenneth Price and Benny “Ben” Cunningham, who have flown Saunders et al. to one far-away location or another.



A screenshot of the USM directory search results for Kenneth Price. The page features the USM logo in the top left and a search bar in the top right. A navigation menu includes links for About, Academics, Admissions, Arts, Athletics, Community, Research, and Student Life. The search results are centered and include the following information:

- Name: Kenneth Price
- Official Name: Kenneth Gerome Price
- Title: Pilot
- Department: Airplane Operations
- P.O. Box: 05110
- Email: Kenneth.G.Price@usm.edu



A screenshot of the USM directory search results for Benny Cunningham. The page features the USM logo in the top left and a search bar in the top right. A navigation menu includes links for About, Academics, Admissions, Arts, Athletics, Community, Research, and Student Life. The search results are centered and include the following information:

- Name: Ben Cunningham
- Official Name: Benny A Cunningham
- Title: Pilot
- Department: Airplane Operations
- P.O. Box: 06003
- Department Phone: 601-265-4130
- Mobile Phone: 601-605-2917
- Email: Benny.Cunningham@usm.edu

As the inserts show, both men are part of a USM auxiliary enterprise referred to as “Airplane Operations.” Both Cunningham and Price are classified as “Pilot” by USM. Neither distinction is reserved for Allen, who works primarily under USM vice president Dennis Wiesenbergh. USMNEWS.net readers who may be interested in this USM auxiliary might want to initiate their own research of it by visiting the online USM directory and checking out “Colin Hand.” One will also find Hand listed as a “Pilot” with USM’s “Airplane Operations” division.

Each of these three USM pilots has shown up on the various flight logs that USMNEWS.net has made public via its reports series, as has Allen. There are, however, a number of others who have piloted the USM aircraft on one trip or another. Table 1 below presents a listing, by last name only, of those who have either (co-)piloted USMAir.

Table 1 – Pilots of USMAir

Allen
Calloway
Cunningham
Gilley
Hand
Kilgore
Kitler
Price

As Table 1 indicates, no fewer than seven (7) different individuals have piloted USMAir on one trip or another. This number could even grow, as more flight logs are examined and made public through the USMNEWS.net series.¹ As it stands, there are many more USM airplane pilots than there are religion faculty in the now-defunct USM religion program – a fact that will not likely be lost on USM faculty who are reading this report. One source tells USMNEWS.net that, while Daniel Capper and the other religion instructors are “teaching out” the USM religion program, it would be fitting for Saunders to negotiate (with the USM Foundation) an end to the airplane lease, and to place these seven above on a “piloting out” program while that negotiation process is ongoing.

Update, 2-Nov-2010

The recent publication of [Part 21](#) of USMNEWS.net’s MS Open Records Request series regarding Saunders’ plane reveals yet another pilot – “Kilgore” – to add to the list above. A quick trip to the online USM directory reveals that this individual is “Andrew L. Kilgore,” a “Part-Time Pilot” who is also affiliated with the Airplane Operations auxiliary at USM. This addition brings the total number of people who have (co-)piloted the USM plane to eight, which is about the number of economics faculty USM lost after 2009-10, the year that Saunders eliminated USM’s B.S. in economics. Sources point out that the Airplane Operations auxiliary is now only one pilot short of being able to field a softball team composed entirely of Air Farce One pilots and co-pilots.

¹ Though it is not known at present what employing all of these pilots costs USM (Mississippi taxpayers and USM students), the figure must, according to sources, be substantial.

