

Zimmerman departs USF Board of Trustees after 11 years

By Nancy McCann
CONTRIBUTOR

Jordan Zimmerman, a USF grad who became one of the university's most prominent benefactors and leaders, is leaving the Board of Trustees after 11 years.

The university confirmed that Lauran Monbarren – who was appointed to the board by Gov. Ron DeSantis on Friday – will replace Zimmerman, effective immediately.

The departure of Zimmerman, who became a trustee in 2010 and served as board chair from 2019 until earlier this year, comes a week after USF President Steve Currall announced he is retiring after just two years in the post.

Zimmerman, 65, founded a Fort Lauderdale-based advertising agency that, according to USF, “discarded conventional wisdom and infused marketing creativity with a relentless focus on data and analytics that drove the bottom line.” It is now the world's 14th largest ad firm.

Over the years, the 1980 USF graduate has also been one of USF's strongest supporters.

He endowed a scholarship program for USF advertising students in 2002 and a professorship in advertising in 2006. In 2015, he donated \$10 million to the College of Arts and Sciences, which named its school of advertising and mass communications in his honor.

Zimmerman was appointed to the Board of Trustees by then-Gov. Charlie Crist in

2010 and reappointed to another five year term by then-Gov. Rick Scott in 2015. He was elected vice chair of the board in 2016 and board chair in 2019.

Zimmerman could not be reached for comment by *The Crow's Nest*. But when the trustees elected Will Weatherford to succeed him as chair in June, he called his service on the board an honor and “amazing opportunity.”

“I truly am in awe of the transformation of the University of South Florida over the past 11-plus years that I have been able to serve,” Weatherford said.

At the June meeting, Weatherford praised Zimmerman for his leadership “through some extremely turbulent times.”

“I think a great sign of



COURTESY OF USF

Jordan Zimmerman, who donated \$10 million to the College of Arts and Sciences, will be replaced by Lauran Monbarren.

leadership is not how you are when things are going well, but how you do when things were really challenging, and

you certainly rose to the occasion,” Weatherford told Zimmerman.

DeSantis appoints daughter of Florida Senate president to USF Board of Trustees

By Michael Alden
aldenm@usf.edu

Gov. Ron DeSantis appointed Lauran Monbarren, the daughter of Florida Senate President Wilton Simpson, R-Triple, to the USF Board of Trustees on July 23.

Monbarren will be the fourth new appointment of the year to the 13-member board, continuing a shakeup that started in January. Her appointment follows the confirmation of former House Speaker Will Weatherford on June 8 as chairman of the board of trustees.

In the announcement from the governor's office, Monbarren is cited as the chief financial officer and vice president of Simpson Environmental Services and Simpson Farms.

Previously, she was an administrator at Pasco-Hernando State College and taught in the Pasco County School District. Monbarren holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in education from Saint Leo University.

Her father, Wilton Simpson, is a Republican who has served in the Senate since 2012 and represents District 10, which includes Citrus, Hernando and part of Pasco County. He was elected Senate president on Nov. 12, 2020, for the 2020-2022 Legislature.

Monbarren replaces longtime trustee Jordan Zimmerman, effective immediately.

The governor appoints six of the USF trustees and the Board of Governors appoints

five. The presidents of the USF Faculty Senate and Student Government are also trustees. All appointees must be approved by the Florida Senate.

In January, two other new members were approved to the board: Melissa Seixas, an executive at Duke Energy Florida, and Shilen Patel, the CEO and founder of a health care technology services firm.

The four new appointments and shakeup of the board come after grumbling by key Pinellas County elected officials about the way USF leaders have handled consolidation of USF's three campuses.

State Sen. Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, has called out the leadership of USF and said its performance “calls for a deep dive” into the board.



COURTESY OF SIMPSON ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Lauran Monbarren serves as the chief financial officer and vice president of Simpson Environmental Services and Simpson Farms.

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“USF is always moving forward,” Weatherford wrote in the announcement. “That is why I am recommending an interim president who can inspire confidence while listening to and advocating for our students, faculty, staff and community; who has the leadership skills to help us pragmatically move forward on key issues; who respects the critical role of our faculty; who understands and can help advance our strong research enterprise and clinical

expertise, and who has the relationships across our region and our state to garner even more support for USF.

Weatherford continued: “Rhea's deep ties within our community and her stellar leadership abilities will help us continue our momentum while we find the next great leader for our university.”

Law earned her bachelor's degree in management from USF while serving as the university project administrator for the Office

of Sponsored Research. She went on to study at Stetson University College of Law, where she served on its Board of Overseers and helped to select university leadership.

She was named a distinguished alumna by the USF Alumni Association in 2018.

The Board of Trustees will meet on Aug. 2 to vote on Weatherford's recommendation. The final decision will depend on approval by the Board of

Governors on Aug. 31.

Law stated that she will not apply for the permanent presidential role.

“I am humbled by Chair Weatherford's recommendation,” Law said. “I care deeply about the University of South Florida and can credit much of my own personal and professional success to the impact USF has had on my life. I am honored to help play a part in USF's next chapter and thank President Currall for his

leadership during the past two years.”

Weatherford's recommendation comes a week after President Currall surprised the USF community by announcing his retirement from the presidency.

Currall served a two-year tenure, which is the shortest in USF's history. He called his time as president “intense” and is stepping down due to health and family reasons.