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California Trip Reception Remarks/Bullets

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California Trip Reception Remarks/Bullets
Dr. John M. Dunn
Jan, 27, 2009

- It's a pleasure to be here and have the opportunity to give you a sense of what is happening on campus and convey the kind of information I always like to share whenever someone asks me to brag a bit about Western Michigan University. I share these for two reasons--because I'm enormously proud of the university I lead and because, as alumni, you want to know how the world perceives your alma mater.
- First of all, I want to talk a little about the quality that is the hallmark of our University. I've been an educator for more than 30 years, and for most of that time, WMU was on my radar as a standout on a variety of fronts. I expected to find a University full of top programs and top people--faculty and students. But those expectations have been far exceeded by what I found.
- For instance, we have an honors college that is one of the oldest honors programs in the nation. The academic credentials of students in our **Lee Honors College** equal or surpass those of students in some of the state and nation's most elite private colleges. Just last weekend, we had 512 of the top students from ten states on our campus to compete for our Medallion Scholarships--\$40,000 over four years. Just 15 of those students will be named Medallion Scholars, but we expect many of the rest to become members of our honors program. To qualify for the competition and an automatic invitation to our honors college requires a 3.7 or higher high school GPA and a score of at least a 26 ACT or 1170 SAT.

- When those students arrive on campus, they'll have an opportunity to build academic careers that may earn them one of the top student accolades in the world--a **Phi Beta Kappa** key. For the past decade, WMU has been one of fewer than 100 public universities in the nation authorized to have its own chapter of Phi Beta Kappa--the nation's oldest and most prestigious honor society.

- **The Carnegie Foundation** for the Advancement of Teaching, which is really the gold standard for categorizing the nation's more than 4,000 colleges and universities, has placed WMU in a group of fewer than 200 research universities in the U.S. --one of only 139 public research universities. Michigan, with five public research universities, is among seven states in the nation with that number or more public research universities. Your home state of California has with public research universities helping it squarely face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

- What makes a great university is really the quality of its faculty. The Council for International Exchange of Scholars in Washington, D.C., recently announced the faculty members from across the country named as **2008-09 Fulbright Scholars**. Among these honored professors who will travel, research and teach abroad are three Western Michigan University educators--from the disciplines of chemistry, comparative religion and history. Among Michigan's research universities, only the University of Michigan, with five, had more faculty members named Fulbright Scholars this year. WMU and Wayne State University have three each and Michigan State University has two.

- One of our faculty members who was a Fulbright Scholar two years ago is **Dr. Matthew Mingus**. He's an expert on government reform will take a break from the

college classroom and put his knowledge to work by serving as an advisor to develop Iraqi local and provincial governments for the next year. Dr. Mingus will serve as a governance advisor for the U.S. Department of State in Iraq for 2009. He left Jan. 21 to start mandatory training in the Washington, D.C., area and should be on the ground in Iraq by mid-February.

Mingus, a 10-year veteran of the WMU faculty and director of the School of Public Affairs and Administration, will take a yearlong unpaid leave to take a post with the embedded Provincial Reconstruction Team based at Camp Taji in Iraq. His fellow team members include U.S. Foreign Service officers and specialists in political affairs, governance, agricultural and economic development, education, health and the rule of law.

- Our students respond to great professors with great performance in the classroom. We take pride in the fact that many of our academic stars are also leaders in and out of the classroom. We've just finished successful athletic seasons on the football field and on the volleyball court.

Our **football** team, which had a solid season and was invited to play Rice University at the Texas Bowl, was led by players like offensive lineman and Academic All-American Phil Swanson and quarterback Tim Hiller, an MBA student carrying a 4.0 GPA.

Our **volleyball** team just won its 10th Mid-American Conference title, advanced to the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA championship was ranked among the nation's top 25 teams. My heart was warmed even more by fact that two of the team's stars--Katie Eberling and Jillian Mitchell--were to the Academic All-MAC volleyball

team. Katie was also named to ESPN the Magazine's Academic All-District IV first team earlier this season.

- Three of our students majoring in **integrated supply management** were among 16 students honored nationally at the ninth annual ISM Services Conference. They, along with the rest of the 16 students so honored, represented top supply management programs at five universities. Each scholar received \$2,000, plus sponsored registration and travel allowance to attend the conference held late last year in Phoenix.

- Let me talk for a bit about a different kind of student success. We've just finished a two-week winter recess when almost the entire campus is shut down. This year, we made an exception for a very special group of students who now call Western Michigan University home.

Our **Seita Scholars** are students who have aged out of the foster care system and who have no homes, no family support systems or any of the other resources that help most of our students navigate the stresses of college life. What they do have is the ability and desire to succeed in college and, now, the support of Western Michigan University.

In previous years or at other schools, when the Christmas holidays came around, those students would have essentially been homeless. No more. For qualified students who are foster care alumni, we've built a program that gives them a year-round home on our campus and the counseling and support structure they need to fulfill their academic potential. We began the program last year, thinking 15 or maybe even 20 students might apply. When fall came, we had 51 Seita Scholars.

The need is great very few students in the foster care system make it to college, and even fewer graduate.

Our program is named for **John Seita**, who survived more than a dozen foster care placements to become a three-time alumnus of WMU, a professor at Michigan State University and the nation's leading advocates for foster care youth. He helped us design our outreach program, and we are so very proud of the way our campus and community are responding to the need. We're even more proud of the accomplishments of the students involved who are overcoming issues and challenges that are unimaginable to most of us.

- Let me also say a few words about our work on building a green campus. Western Michigan University is making huge strides in setting the standard for campus sustainability. Our energy saving initiatives continue to attract the attention of both the private sector and our sister institutions around the country.

On nearly a monthly basis, we entertain operations teams from around the country who visit our high-tech energy center to ask: "How do you grow your campus by 19 percent at the same time you reduce your energy consumption by 17 percent?" We're developing "best practices" for campus energy savings. We just avoided nearly \$500,000 in costs over the holiday recess through aggressive approaches to energy savings.

- And our students have embraced sustainability and are continuing a long WMU tradition of environmental scholarship. Last spring, Michael Gregor became the fifth WMU student since 2000 to win a prestigious **Morris K. Udall Scholarship**.

The Udall Scholarship is the nation's premiere award for students in environmental studies and public policy. Winners routinely hail from such institutions as Harvard, Duke, Yale, Stanford, Cornell and Dartmouth.

- Finally, because I'm on the West Coast, I want to talk about WMU's latest star of the small screen. Dr. Quentin Smith, professor of philosophy, is internationally known for his work on the philosophy of time and the origins of the universe. He's currently featured on 14 different episodes of the new PBS series "Closer to Truth" and late last year, a Scottish crew flew into Kalamazoo to interview him for a 2009 BBC program called "The Search for Truth."

All of this, of course, means he is being seen by millions of television viewers and extending his reputation--and the University's among audiences around the world. He's been attracting this kind of attention for about a decade and has been featured in the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune and on an earlier PBS series.

- Some of you may have taken a history course from Dr. Paul Maier, who is our longest-serving faculty member and still going strong. This year, he is celebrating his 50th year at WMU. He's something of a media phenomenon himself. His expertise on early Christianity has been tapped over the past several years by the likes of U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek and ABC News. He still loves to teach freshman in introductory history classes--he likes to get them started right.
- I could go on, but I'm sure some of you have some specific questions or WMU topics you want to know more about, so let's stop here to take those questions.