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Kalamazoo Area Runners Annual Banquet Keynote

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Opening

• Good evening. I am John M. Dunn and I am a runner. If that sounds a bit like the start of a personal statement in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, so be it. Long ago, I discovered the addictive qualities of the running life.

Like all of you, I go through periods when for one reason or another I cannot indulge my love for running, but on the whole, I share the feeling of author and marathon runner John Bryant, who once said, "My feeling is that any day I am too busy to run is a day that I am too busy.

Setting the stage

But as you know--or have just learned--I do have a day job. Before I talk to you more about my running, I need to set the stage. It's been my habit whenever I speak to make sure my audience knows what kind of place Western Michigan University is.

It is especially important for local audiences, because I have found that in this community, many people feel they know about the University already, but often they "know" WMU from some previous time and are surprised to learn what the University is today. Here are just a few quick facts that I think every resident of the Kalamazoo area needs to know.

First, the stats--

Let's start with the basics.
• Nearly 25,000 students, including about 6,000 from Kalamazoo County
• More than 4,000 employees
• More than 165,000 alumni, with 111,000 living in Michigan and 20,000 alums in Kalamazoo County.
• Our alumni range from the leaders of PriceWaterhouseCoopers and the University of Minnesota to a young man--Matt Giraud--staking his claim tonight as a semifinalist on "American Idol"

That's just for starters. I also want you to know some other very important things about the University.

• WMU is one of fewer than 200 research universities in the nation, as designated by the Carnegie Foundation, which is the gold standard in higher education.

• The University has an economic impact in Kalamazoo County alone of more than $600 million annually.

• The University is laced with programs that are among the top such programs of their kind in the nation and the world. And it will surprise you, I know, that many of those programs have lengthy waiting lists of students who want desperately to enroll but for whom we simply don't have the room.

• WMU's internationally recognized disciplines run broad and deep, ranging from atomic physics and graph theory to creative writing, paper science, engineering management, the fine arts and the health and life sciences.
• I could keep going, but suffice it to say, my day job is one that is a full one. It's one that I believe I do better because of the role running plays in my life.

Running history
- I started running…when, and because….
  - how often
  - how far
  - significant times away from running

Intro to Kalamazoo
• I can't vouch for the accuracy of this, but it's probably true. During my first visit to Kalamazoo when I was a candidate for the position of president of Western Michigan University, I did not really have an opportunity to run.

The interview schedule was packed--from early breakfasts with community members to late evening dinners. I was staying in the Gilmore Alumni House near the campus, and the graduate student who manages the house has since become my assistant. He tells me the first words I said to him were:

"Hi, I'm John Dunn. I understand you have a treadmill in the basement."

• I did, of course, become president, and when I came back to Kalamazoo, one of the first things I did was to begin early morning runs through the campus and through the city--discovering everything from convenient shoe repair shops to incredible examples of period architecture and wonderful neighborhoods--I was captivated by what I found.
The view from the streets

- I try to run wherever I am, simply because, as you all know, the view from the streets--the one that runners see--is a terrific way to get to know a community.

  - You get a sense of a place's architecture, rhythm, ethnicity, history, prosperity and priorities.

  - You get a feeling for the character of a place's neighborhoods.

  - You quickly learn the grid--the layout and sometimes even the geography behind that grid and a sense of how and why that grid is changing.

The view from within

- But the view within while running is just as important to me. I'm an advocate of urging everyone to take time daily to exercise. We all know that physical activity is good for your heart. Experts now agree that activity is equally good for our minds--a tool to develop clearer thinking and a better memory. I believe that activity and discipline--the kind that comes from running--also nurture a person’s soul.

- Running is my time to recharge batteries--my own internal batteries and the batteries on my BlackBerry, which does get left behind. That's probably the only time during the day when that piece of hardware is not attached or within a few feet of me. When I run, I think and reflect. Exercise as a contributor to clear thinking
• Time spent running has always been a personal time-out for me—an attempt to keep my life in balance. The challenge of keeping that personal time-out as part of my life has become increasingly tough over the years, and I suspect the same is true for everyone here tonight.

• This year's pop culture book focuses on just how difficult it has become to maintain balance and carve out just a little bit of time for such personal reflection and time alone.

• The book is "Elsewhere USA: How We Got from the Company Man, Family Dinners, and the Affluent Society to the Home Office, BlackBerry Moms, and Economic Anxiety" by New York University sociologist Dalton Conley. In it, Conley zeros in on the changes that have happened in the past three decades that have become the forces that keep us from achieving work/life balance.

- Boundaries that have blurred or dissolved between leisure and work, public space and private space, and home and office.

- Wired and wireless technology that allow and even encourage us to work 24/7.

- Technology that encourages us to multi-task—conversing with our children and spouses while scrolling through e-mails on our BlackBerrys or posting to our Facebook account.
Technology that is both a blessing and a curse, seductive and addictive, making us feel both empowered and overextended as we play multiple roles—worker, boss, parent, spouse, friend, and client—all in the same instant.

Here's a quick passage from that book. See if it sounds familiar.

"Leisure? The "good life"? What are those? Work is the central aspect of our lives. We are lucky that it is fulfilling work—work that we will probably continue to do until we are no longer capable—but it is, unlike that of my parents, all-consuming work.

There is always an e-mail to answer, a paper or memo to read, and a lecture to give or receive. Success in today's professional world doesn't mean retiring at fifty to play golf in Florida, it means working more and more hours as you move up a towering ladder of economic opportunity."

Professor Conley is on a book tour now, meeting with reporters in cities across the nation. Probably the best question posed to him by one of those reporters is this:

"Do you find it difficult to sit here and talk to me without checking your BlackBerry?"

Of course, his answer was "Yes, definitely."

That's what we're all up against. Conley's description of work life today captures my life. Does it capture yours? Have you been tempted to take your cell phone running with you?
For me, that time away and on the run has become more vital than ever.

**The view on the campus**

- When I run, I run in Kalamazoo, and on the campus in Western Michigan University. I've told you what I've discovered in my runs through the city. Now let me tell you what I find when I run through the campus. It's a beautiful run, and one I invite you to take and add to your regular running schedule.

- Oakland Drive past the Kalamazoo Psychiatric Hospital and WMU's spectacular College of Health and Human Services. The sidewalks are in good repair here and a great surface for running.

- Past Historic East Campus. Circle East Hall and say hello to Dwight Waldo, whose ashes are embedded in a cornerstone on the Prospect Hill side of the building.

- Down to the main campus where the traffic in the morning is light (students aren't early risers) and the fact that there are no through roads means lots of opportunity for foot traffic.

- Past Waldo Library and our new Chemistry Bldg. Swing around the Fine Arts Plaza, Miller Auditorium and the spectacular new Richmond Center for Visual Arts.

- Past our Kohrmann Hall, and Faunce Student Services, under the Haenicke Hall arch, and down to the center of campus or off to the Haworth/Fetzer loop.
• The routes and variations are endless. You may even want to run along Drake Road, pass Asylum Lake and take advantage of the loop road, Campus Drive that circles our Parkview Campus, which is home to our College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and the Business Technology and Research Park.

• But my point is simple. The Western Michigan University campus is your home campus in Kalamazoo. I invite you to visit, run and make the same kind of discoveries I made when I first came to Kalamazoo two years ago. You are welcome. We want to see you there.

Start now and you'll be ready for the challenge in the fall when we hold our annual Campus Classic 5K run. If crowds aren't your preference when you run, let me remind you again, that the early mornings on a college campus are quiet. You may only see a solitary university president out recharging his batteries. Don't hesitate to say hello.

Thank you.