Spring into the Streets Welcoming Remarks

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Welcome and, behalf of the entire University community, thank you for being here today and thank you for bringing this longtime Western Michigan University tradition back to life. I understand it has been six years since there has been a WMU "Spring Into the Streets."

I think we all owe a round of applause to Andrew Van Wasshnova and the team at Student Activities and Leadership Programs for recognizing what an asset the program is--to both our students and our community--and doing the legwork that brought us all here today.

For all of us, Kalamazoo is home--year round, for eight months--it doesn't really matter. We're part of this place. Kalamazoo is the community that helped give this university birth, and now, embraces us all as integral parts of the neighborhoods and the cultural and academic life of the city.

It's always easy to say we owe this community our time, energy and effort. It's quite another thing to actually turn out and pledge time to specific organizations, and individuals who need our help. Opportunities like "Spring Into the Streets" give us the impetus to step out of our workday world and into the lives of the people around us.

We talk a lot about volunteering and experiential learning. It's so much more than just accumulating service hours for your organization or to fulfill a class expectation. It's a chance to really see in real time the impact it is possible to make as an individual. It's a chance to really know our fellow community members, see
how you can help them fill their needs and learn how that, in turn can affect your own life.

• You may hear me say this again at commencement. For the past couple of years, I've made it a point to remind graduates that service is the path to happiness. Doing great things requires dedication of one's chosen profession. It also means committing to serve others--your family, friends and those less fortunate.

Be generous with your time, talent and resources, and if you do, the rewards--extrinsically and intrinsically-- will be plentiful. Some of the world’s most brilliant humanists --Albert Schweitzer, Mother Teresa to name just two--remind us time and time again that true happiness is gained only when we give generously to others.

George Washington Carver may have said it best, “How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because, someday in your life, you will have been all of these.”

• That may sound a bit heavy, though, and I see by the looks on your faces that you're excited, eager to be out there meeting people and curious about what the day will bring. Have fun, too.

When you're cleaning up parks in Comstock, raking yards in one of the neighborhoods, serving food at Ministry with Community or preparing gardens for Fair Food Matters, just enjoy yourselves and the opportunity to reach out and get to know new people. Come back to campus tired but invigorated and have a wonderful weekend.
Thank you.