4-20-2009

Make-a-Difference Awards

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• Good afternoon and thank you all for being here to celebrate the extraordinary service of the staff members we're honoring today. We see their work as extraordinary, but I know from experience that these employees usually don't see what they do as extraordinary. They see what they do as a labor of love.

• These are people who have built their careers at Western Michigan University. Every day, those around them see them reach out to our students and their colleagues in a way that is driven not by their job descriptions, but by their genuine commitment to and concern for those who are part of our community.

• I have the privilege of seeing this kind of service in people across the University. Often, someone will point out an employee who falls into this category--just because they think I should know.

• What has been surprising to me and deeply gratifying as a new president is the number of people at our University who fall into this category. You know, awards programs like this one frequently begin with dozens of nominations. After a few years, sometimes the nominations begin to slack off or the caliber of the nominees decline as people feel the truly special people have already been honored.

• That's not the case at Western Michigan University. One of the things that has impressed me most since I've been here is the continuing outstanding caliber of the employees we honor through the Make a Difference program and the level of the service they provide every day. Today we honor 11 from every area at the University--academics, student services, business and finance. These are people who truly make this a special place.
• (If you want to use an example--Deveta Gardner of Career and Student Employment Services is one of the honorees. She's up to her eyeballs in work today as the organizer of the Education Career Fair, and her day began by being on campus at 6 a.m. for a series of interviews with Ch. 3 outside the Bernhard Center--before it even opened. The fair runs until 4 p.m., so if she is able to take a few moments to attend the Make-a-Difference event, she'll be on the run to get back to the fair.)

• Thank you to each of you for what you do each day for our University. Thank you for making our students safe, healthy and ready to succeed. And thank you for giving all of us role models to emulate as we continue about the important work we do.

• You make us proud, and you continually reinforce our view of this as a wonderful place to work.