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Wellness Conference Remarks

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Wellness Conference Remarks
President John M. Dunn
May 13, 2009

• Good morning and welcome to Western Michigan University. I think you'll find that our University community is pleased that you are here and tremendously supportive of the topic that has your focus today.

• If you who are familiar with our recent advertising campaigns, you know that we always pose the question, "What's behind the W?" While the answer is multifaceted, one correct answer is "wellness."

• This is a community that embraces the mind/body connection and reaches out in a multitude of ways to our students, to our faculty and to our staff. We have years of data that demonstrate how important exercise and good health is to employee morale. It's good for our individual and collective outlook and good for the bottom line.

• We have a campuswide wellness committee made up of professionals in health care, dietetics, HR, recreation, business and finance. We have a Wellness mission statement: to promote and improve the wellness of the campus community by empowering each employee to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors and create a healthy culture thereby improving productivity and reducing health care costs.

• For some 20 years, we've run "Zest For Life," an opportunity for all benefits-eligible Western Michigan University employees, retirees and their spouses to enhance personal health and well-being free of charge. Through
Zest For Life, various health promotion programs and fitness/wellness opportunities are offered each semester.

- On our campus, wellness and "spirit" are becoming synonymous. Our students decided to promote school spirit with Western Wednesdays. Our Zest for Life staff tapped into that with Wellness Wednesdays. Tonight, for instance, there's a Zest for Life nutrition and exercise class.

- Since late 2006, we've also worked with Kalamazoo-based Holtyn and Associates Health Promotion Consultants. We hired them run our employee wellness program--Western Wellness-- Improving on a Good Thing. Our employees can pursue their personally tailored goals independently or exercise in groups. They can work through Zest for Life or they can join the West Hills Athletic Club or other currently offered programs.

- During the first year--our pilot year--575 people participated in our voluntary Holtyn-managed program.
  - 172 staff and faculty lowered their cholesterol levels
  - 150 lowered their blood pressure
- Wellness works.

- I'll just close by telling you something I like to share with our graduates. At commencement we're celebrating academic achievement, but I like to remind them to strike a balance and keep wellness part of their focus.

- While I urge them to continue to challenge and nurture their minds, I ask them to
remember, too, that good health is essential throughout one's life and they should 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 your mind--giving you clearer thinking and a better memory. I believe that activity and discipline also nurture a person’s soul.

• You're here today to talk about the benefits we can measure, but also about the less tangible but very real benefits to wellness. Enjoy your discussions--and make sure you find time for balance in your own life.

Thank you.