5-18-2009

St. Joseph/Benton Harbor Rotary Presentation

John M. Dunn
Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn
Part of the Higher Education Commons

WMU ScholarWorks Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dunn/278

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of the President at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WMU President John Dunn by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
• Good afternoon and thank you (name?) for that wonderful introduction. My thanks to the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor Rotary Club for inviting me to be here today.

• I came to speak with you in November of 2007--shortly after my arrival at Western Michigan University. As I stand before you, I am struck by how much has happened since then but also by how much our conversation that day--about the importance of education --still resonates and becomes more important than ever.

• We talked in 2007 about the power of partnerships and collaboration as well as the economic engine that a research university like Western Michigan can bring to the table to benefit the communities we serve. I'd like to pick up the threads of that conversation today.

• First, though, I'd like to acknowledge and congratulate the young people who have been part of the program today. They are impressive students. You will hear more from them in the future. They really are the future. That future is what I'm here to talk about.

**Economic stimulus**
• These young people are a little younger but very much like the ones we celebrated on the Western Michigan University campus late last month when nearly 2,500 students received their degrees.
Those young graduates are headed back to their home communities--perhaps only temporarily, though. I urge you to take a close look at those graduates. When you do, you are looking at our state and nation's true stimulus package.

• Our graduates have the ability to make our economy soar to unprecedented heights and chart a future of unimaginable creativity and promise. And yes, if you have a chance to, you should hire them! Do not wait. As with any top-notch opportunity, you need to move quickly, or you will lose out on a transformational moment.

• These young people truly are the future. They are an important part of our path out of today's economic difficulties. They are the hope of our state and the hope of their families--with good cause. They have a degree--the one protective device that can keep them out of the unemployment line and keep our state moving toward a better future.

• At the same time our state unemployment rate hovers around 13 percent, the national jobless rate for those with a college degree is still just 4.4 percent. Tomorrow's high-growth job fields--in health care, engineering, information technology, teaching, science and finance--will require at least a bachelor's degree.

You will not find anyone knowledgeable about Michigan's long-term fiscal recovery who is not convinced that higher education is the linchpin to our future. We need a work force for the future.
• At Western Michigan University, we've been doing our part to build a work force for Michigan's future by emphasizing WMU's three hallmark qualities:
  - Academic excellence,
  - Access and affordability, and
  - A focus on student success

• Now, I know that each one of you has a card at your place that lists just some of Western Michigan University's Points of Pride.

They are quality markers that outline some of the resources that we can bring to the task of reinforcing those three qualities and educating our students and preparing them to take heir place as a productive part of Michigan's future.

Western Michigan University is a research university--one of fewer than 200 in the nation and five in Michigan. Our resources and ability to act as an economic engine for the communities we serve is enormous. Our greatest contribution to economic growth however is that stimulus package I mentioned a few moments ago--our students.

You may already see these bright young people in your communities. About 2000 students from this area are enrolled annually at WMU.

  - More than 1,000 students from the St. Joseph/Benton Harbor area are studying at WMU in Kalamazoo.
Another 1,000 study each year at WMU-Southwest, which is located on the campus of Lake Michigan College. They’re taking advantage of opportunities like our bachelor's degree programs in business, manufacturing engineering and education—all available to students without ever leaving the Benton Harbor/St/ Joe area.

Students also have the nine graduate degree options and a growing number of online options. (Our new WMU-Southwest director, Jeorge Fierro is with us today.)

- When those students from this area graduate, they'll join the nearly 10,000 alumni in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties. You see and work with our alumni everyday. More than 20 are here with us today. They include my tablemates this afternoon:
  - Nanette Keiser, president of the Berrien Community Foundation
  - Lynn Kellogg, CEO of the Area Agency on Aging
  - A Psholka, who works in Congressman Upton's office
  - Bill Downey, spokesperson for the Cook Nuclear Plant
  - Art Fenrick, executive director of the Southwest Michigan Action Agency
  - (Possibly) Dr. Robert Harrison, interim president of Lake Michigan College

Individual alumni like the ones I just mentioned illustrate the power of Western Michigan University. When you meet our students and see them in action, they will stand out in your memory as well.
- There's Jamie Loeks (pronounced Lukes) who recently completed an internship at Whirlpool and just weeks ago went on to be named one of just eight university students in the nation to become a Richter scholar, which recognizes the top young minds in supply chain management.

- There's Katherine M. Smith, an education major from Benton Harbor who just finished a teaching internship at Hartford's Woodside Elementary School and was honored for her success with a State Farm Scholarship.

- If you don't know any WMU students yet personally, here's an invitation to see one local student in action. This afternoon our award-winning vocal jazz ensemble Gold Company will be on "Oprah." Oprah today--includes Junior Benjamin Farac Jr. of nearby Coloma.

  (And if you're an American Idol fan, I hope you enjoyed watching our alumnus, Matt Giraud, make it into the top five of this year's competition. )

• Students like Jamie, Katherine and Benjamin--and Matt--are our core mission, but Western Michigan University is an economic engine for this community in a number of other ways as well. There's one in particular that has long-term ramifications for this entire area.

**Ft. St. Joseph**

For the past 11 years, a team of WMU archaeologists has been uncovering the remnants of Fort St. Joseph, one of the most important 18th-century outposts in the Midwest. Located within the city of Niles limits, the site has
what we believe to be the potential to become a major Midwest historical tourism site.

Dr. Dr. Michael Nassaney, the WMU professor directing the project, sees this as something like an earlier and more international version of Fort Mackinaw in Northern Michigan. Each summer, Dr. Nassaney brings a field school of students here to uncover more of the artifact-rich site.

And each summer a site open house attracts thousands of people to visit the site to see the site and watch the techniques of archaeology in progress. There will be another one this summer, so be sure to visit if you haven't yet had a chance to.

The site is also attracting the international attention of archaeologists. We recently signed a new 10-year agreement with the city of Niles, so you can expect that collaboration to grow and continue to serve as an attraction for visitors who will stay and tour the other attractions here.

**Community college partnerships**

- Finally, I'd like to tell you about our partnerships with community colleges. Lake Michigan College is one of our oldest and strongest partners.

We’ve been working with LMC and other community colleges in Southwest Michigan to reach out to students and make their transition from associate degree to a bachelor's degree program simple and seamless. At LMC, we offer three bachelor's degree programs in their entirety at our facility on the LMC campus.
Elsewhere, we've even begun recruiting and admitting students to WMU and our community college partners at the same time so that students have all the benefits and resources--advising, libraries, technology--that both institutions can provide. That intense collaboration will ensure that the students involved take the right classes and they can move effortlessly from one level to the next.

We're determined that they become part of Michigan's economic stimulus as well.

Now I know some of you have questions, so I'll stop here and let you pose them. Thank you, it's been my honor to visit with you this afternoon.