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Fort St. Joseph Media Day

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• Thank you, Michael, for the kind introduction. And thank your Mayor McCauslin and the Support the Fort organization for welcoming us--again--to your community.

• I have to say how much I've been looking forward to today. I have attended previous open houses here on the Fort St. Joseph site, but I've never been able to make it down to the formal annual opening. It's an initiative I consider a marquee example of what a community/university partnership can accomplish--and I'm delighted to be here to talk about it today.

• This project represents the best of what we can do together when University resources and skills are combined with a community's legacy, commitment, resources and sense of pride. This is good for the community and could well lead, in the future, to heritage tourism and economic development.

• This is good for the University--it provides a field experience of the highest quality for our students and an exciting long-term research focus for our faculty. (You could add that students from other universities are benefitting as well because they also have the opportunity to enroll in WMU's annual field school and be part of what we believe to be the oldest and most comprehensive such field school in the nation.)

• We’re in our 35th year of the annual Archaeological Field School. We kept offering this significant experience even as other institutions were abandoning their field operations--only to begin starting them up again over the past few years. We have always known that there is no substitute for a field experience that gives
students sound practical experience in finding, excavating and preserving a historical site.

• As we began developing a long-term relationship with the community of Niles, starting in 1998, we've noticed enormous benefits to our students. They want to return to the field school every year because they build a circle of friends here and feel the warmth of the Niles Community surrounding their work. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Butler family, for hosting our group on their farm over the years.

• Our students also want to return, because they know they are part of discovering something of great significance. For all of us who are residents of the Great Lakes region, this is a reminder of just how significant our region's role was in the early development of our nation. It's not unusual for people on the East Coast to focus on their heritage sites that date back to the 18th century. What is uncovered here is a reminder that our own history during that era and our people and location’s unique role in the nation's economic and cultural development.

• As we move forward, more structural finds will help the community learn what the fort looked like, and future accurate re-creations will become possible. That is the goal of our partnership with you--to know more about what life was like at this outpost and to share that knowledge with a broad audience.

• I have to express my thanks for all the work that goes into this annual open house. What you all do to elevate the profile of this place takes us that much closer to a site that is open to the public for more than just these two days each year.
• Thank you to all who work on this project and thank you to the community of Niles for making the commitment to uncovering our past in a way that will benefit our future.