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Welcome to New Faculty Members

John M. Dunn

Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

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Welcome to New Faculty Members
Dr. John M. Dunn
Aug. 16, 2010

- Good morning. I am delighted to welcome you to Western Michigan University and proud that you accepted the opportunity we extended for you to teach and continue your scholarship here as part of our University community.
- We are convinced you are a good match for this University community--that's why we extended our offer. You made a wise decision in accepting. You were savvy enough to recognize the caliber of this University and community, the tremendous potential for career and family satisfaction here, and the unique and appealing nature of becoming a citizen of Kalamazoo, Mich., at this interesting and challenging point in time.
- This is a tremendous University to work for and you join a faculty body that is highly accomplished. I am continually reminded of just how good our faculty is, and this summer has been no exception. Over the past six weeks, for instance, two of our faculty researchers--Nora Berrah in physics and Yirong Mo in chemistry--have been featured in the pages of Nature. The work of another, Maarten Vonhof of biological sciences, appeared just last week in the cover story of Science magazine.
- This is also the University at which acclaimed short story writer Stuart Dybek built his career and then retired. He still teaches in our Prague Sumer Writing Program when he's not too busy using his MacArthur Foundation "genius award" to fulfill some lifelong literary goals.

- I hope your impressions about WMU so far are good. Just in case you hit a rough patch or two as you ease into life in your new community, let me reassure you by sharing a story.

- About 57 years ago on a bleak early winter evening, a young graduate student and his friend were hitchhiking home for the weekend--just passing through town. They found themselves standing on Stadium Drive, just a few blocks from here. It was the proverbial dark and stormy night. A driving snowstorm and extreme cold chilled them to the bone as they waited in desperation for a ride out of town. The young student could not see a thing, but he remembers one thing vividly. He asked his friend the name of the town they were in and was told it was Kalamazoo.

"Mark my words," he said to his friend. "I will never set foot in this white hell-hole again as long as I live."

He did set foot in town a few years later--in much the same way you came here. This fall, that same young man, now a little grayer and infinitely wiser, will celebrate his 52nd anniversary as a member of the WMU community--50 of those years as a faculty member in our Department of History. Dr. Paul Maier is the Russell Seibert Professor of Ancient History and a world-renowned expert on the history of early Christianity. He is a regular source for reporters and editors at such places as Newsweek and ABC News. His 17 books range from scholarly dissections of the work of ancient historians to best-selling mysteries. He has inspired generations of students, and he's had more than his share of fun along the way. Technically, he could have celebrated his 50th anniversary of teaching last year, since he began as a visiting lecturer in 1959. But he treasures his 1960 faculty appointment date as the milestone he wants to celebrate.

That is the kind of career I wish for each of you. You made a conscious decision to come to Western Michigan University. You came here because of your desire to be part of a great research university where you can work, build your career and make your mark. You made a good decision. I look forward to seeing you thrive and grow in your profession. I promise to be here--at least in spirit--when you mark your 50th anniversary of teaching, research and service.

Thank you.