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Paul Maier Retirement Dinner Remarks

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Good evening. I am so pleased to be part of this celebration tonight--but also saddened to know that it means we will not be seeing quite as much of a faculty member who is truly an integral part of this institution. It's been a privilege for me to travel around the country and always encounter alumni who ask about Dr. Maier. Invariably, I hear the kind of message any university president would be proud to hear, as those alumni recount how their lives were affected by learning history from Dr. Paul Maier.

There are a lot of those alumni. That's because no one has been here as long as Paul Maier. He has served for 50 years as a member of the WMU faculty. (He actually came here 52 years ago, but is adamant in viewing his appointment to a tenure-track position in 1960 as the formal start to his service here.) But we won't quibble. Let's just say that most of the people who were here when he started are names you see every day--on buildings.

Longevity is a great thing, but it's what Paul Maier has done with that 50-plus years here that is so significant. He is the epitome of what any University would want its professors to be. He has built an international reputation as a scholar of ancient history and one of the world's leading authorities on early Christianity. He has published historical works and popular fiction, videos and children's books. As technology has changed, over the years, his name has gone from the Rolodex to the speed dial to the Smartphone directory for members of the national media. He has been covered on the pages of People, U.S. News & World Report and Time and has been seen on the air on, "The Today Show" and ABC News specials.
• He has and continues to travel and lecture around the world, but through it all, he has always brought those stellar experiences as a scholar right back into his classroom. Our students--50 years worth of our students--have reaped the benefit of learning history from one of the world's outstanding scholars--and someone who is an engaging lecturer. They love him, and the feeling seems to be mutual. He has always asked to teach introductory courses so he could let students know right away that history can be highly entertaining.

• In December, I invited Paul to attend the Board of Trustees meeting. I noted his coming retirement, talked about his service and introduced him to the board and the audience--who gave him a standing ovation. The meeting continued and then at the very end, one of our trustees announced that he'd like to share some comments with his fellow trustees and the audience.

Trustee Jim Hettinger, as many of you know, is an alumnus who went on to enjoy a career as an internationally acclaimed economic development guru. Here's what he said:

"I could not pass up this moment. As a freshman in January 1968, I made the acquaintance of Dr. Paul Maier through a class called "Western Civilization." It was one of the best classes I ever had--and I went through a master's and partial doctorate as well...I just want Dr. Maier to know that not only did I enjoy his class, but he was one of the best professors I've ever had throughout all of my academic pursuits."

The heartfelt tribute was directed right at Paul Maier, who had been sitting in the front row for the entire meeting. Jim Hettinger stopped and Paul fired back a quick response.
"I still won't change your grade," he said.

• While I'm standing here hoping we have a campus full of young Paul Maiers, I find out that he has gone through life as a Bronco incredulous that we pay him for doing what he loves. He recently remarked to a staff member that "there is no greater job than being a university professor. I've actually had a little pang of conscience all these years about cashing my paychecks."

• Paul, ignore your conscience. Cash those last checks with pride and enjoy your 50-plus years worth of retirement contributions. You've earned every penny. Thank you for your service to our university and community and for your passion for your discipline. We could not have asked for any more.