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Faculty Retirement Dinner

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Faculty Retirement Dinner
Remarks
President John M. Dunn
May 31, 2012

- Good evening. As always, I am honored to be here this evening to celebrate your retirement from Western Michigan University.
- Linda and I came to our first Faculty Retirement Recognition Dinner five years ago--before we were actually part of this campus community. I remember the kind of deep appreciation I felt that night for the caliber of the people I was meeting--and the sense of regret that I might not have the opportunity to know them better.
- This year, as I look out among you, I see friends I've been privileged to work with. And I have no sense of regret--for two reasons. First, I'm celebrating with you and know how well-deserved your new life of retirement will be. Second, I really don't intend to let you go. You will continue to hear from me and I expect you to remain the treasured part of our community we recognize tonight.
- There are 22 faculty members being honored this evening and we recognize one--our colleague Catherine Julien--posthumously. You represent six of our seven degree-granting colleges. You have been the heart of this University, and when you leave us, you collectively take with you more than 660 (666) years of service and institutional memory. This year's faculty retirees have individual years of service that range from 13 to 44 years, for an average of more than 30 years.
- What I want to do is to simply thank you for your commitment and contributions. I also want to thank your family members who have been part of your life here--your

loved ones who have supported you in so many ways and helped you to be productive. I know many are here with you tonight, and even though our focus this evening is on you, this milestone is theirs as well. So please join me in extending the gratitude of this University to them (pause to lead applause).

- In that average 30 years of service, you have witnessed countless physical changes, including spectacular new homes for several colleges and wonderful new teaching and arts facilities. Even more important, you've seen this University grow from a regional institution to the national research university it is today. No, let me correct that. You didn't just see that evolution. Your work--your teaching, your research and your creative minds--fueled that growth and made this University the renowned institution it is today.

- You are retiring from the faculty and a lifetime of commitment to higher education, but I don't believe for one minute that you're done with the intellectually rich and challenging life of an academic. You've been engaged for the past decade in a profession that revolves around optimism and hope. That's a way of life--not something you can turn off with a change in your faculty status.

- W.H. Auden once said "A professor is one who talks in someone else's sleep." I think that's about right, and as we honor you tonight, I want you to think about those "someone else's" all around the world. They're your students for whom your voice is a permanent part of their dreams and the sense of direction they can summon to meet a challenge. They are your legacy.

- When I think about retirement and the fact that faculty retirements take great teachers from our midst, I am reminded and always like to share the words of Louis Armstrong when he talked about the possibility of retiring.

"Musicians don't retire," he said. "They stop when there's no more music in them."

- I think the same is true for those who have spent their lives in the classroom. Teachers don't retire. They stop when there's no more love of education in them. As I look at all of you and all you've accomplished, and as I listen to your stories of life as faculty members at this university, I know none of you will truly retire.

- You'll change your focus a bit. You're not retiring "from" something, as some people do. You're retiring "to" a life of new discovery and intellectual inquiry. Those ideas and dreams that have been dancing in the background can now take center stage.

- Whether you plan to move or stay in this city, I want you all to know that no matter where you are, you will remain--always--a part of this university community. I look forward to seeing you on campus enjoying yourselves in the coming months and years. You've earned it.

Thank you.