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Dr. Michitoshi Soga Memorial Service

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Good afternoon and welcome to today's remembrance and celebration of the life of a remarkable man who was part of our University community for more than 45 years.

I had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Soga only during his last few years as a member of the Western Michigan University community. His career in the physics classroom had ended by the time we met, but he remained an educator. His career as this community's unofficial Ambassador to Japan was in full swing. In that role, he reached out to Japanese visitors to West Michigan, Japanese alumni and American students who headed to Japan to study abroad.

I marvel at the fact that years after his formal retirement, he remained such an integral part of our campus community--active, engaged and effective. His mission was not tied to a job, but to a calling we know as global understanding. Virtually every major visitor who came from Japan to West Michigan for business or educational purposes during the past few decades had the opportunity to meet and know Mi-chi-to-shi Soga as a friend.

he left a legacy that includes thousands of Japanese alumni, scores of new community friends who first came here as visitors and generations of young people who will be forever affected by their studies in the Battle Creek Japanese school that Dr. Soga helped establish.
They remember, of course, what their studies or interactions with our community taught them, but more important, they remember and cherish the way Dr. Soga made them feel.

Poet Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

That was truly Professor Soga's gift. This university, this community, this region and this state have a special relationship with Dr. Soga's home nation because of the way he made people from that nation feel about our people and our commitment to cultural understanding.

The fact that so many from both nations are gathered here today is quiet testament to his legacy as an ambassador and as an educator.

I don't know if Dr. Soga ever became a fan of his adopted nation's classic music genre, jazz. But when I think of Dr. Soga and his long and productive career--a career that lasted long after retirement--I will always recall the words of jazz great Louis Armstrong when asked to reflect on the possibility of his own retirement.

"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. That never happened for Dr. Soga, and this campus, community, nation and world are the better for it.

Thank you for being here today to honor a remarkable life.