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Grand Rapids MBA 50th Anniversary

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Good evening. What a great crowd here tonight to celebrate a program that for 50 years has been a resource for the Grand Rapids business community and, indeed, for all of West Michigan.

Because of this program, there are nearly 1,300 WMU MBA graduates who are now and have for decades been making a real impact on the Grand Rapids area economy. WMU MBA alums were in this community making a difference before a certain other B school was even a twinkle in anyone's eye. I'm proud of that fact and I hope each of you is mindful and proud to be part of that legacy as well.

An important part of that legacy is the fact that the Grand Rapids business community invested itself in this program. A group of Grand Rapids businessmen asked WMU to establish a master's program for their employees--something employees could pursue after work and on a part-time basis. What we responded with was one of the first such MBA programs anywhere, and it helped stop the loss of talented young business professionals who had been leaving the city for full-time MBA programs in places like Ann Arbor and Chicago.

Companies like American Seating and Lear Siegler were heavily involved in developing our GR MBA. In fact, the first courses for the MBA were held in the Lear Siegler plant and at Godwin Heights High School. Of course, when the University invested in first the Beltline Graduate Center and then this beautiful facility, that changed, but I think that business community involvement remains part of this program's core legacy.
• We've always operated our regional programs in a way that reflects commitment to the communities we serve. Western Michigan University has been in Grand Rapids for more than 100 years. And with the MBA program a vital part of this community since 1964, I think it’s safe to say that WMU and its students and alumni--you--are firmly embedded in the DNA of this region.

• What this community and its citizens got in the bargain was a program of enormous quality. I believe you could call it a terrific Return on Investment. The Grand Rapids MBA program is part of the Haworth College of Business, which is among just five percent of the world's business schools accredited at both the graduate and undergraduate levels by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. And it has been praised as one of the "rising stars" among the nation's business schools.

• A few years ago, there was a round of jokes that started this way, "You know you're an MBA if..."
  -if you decide to reorganize your family into a team-based organization.
  - if you think it is actually efficient to write a ten-page paper with six other people you do not know.
  - if you account for your tuition as a capital expenditure instead of an expense.

• All solid comments, but I'd tailor them a bit. You know you're a WMU MBA if you are convinced your degree makes an impact every day in your own life and on the quality of life in your community.

Thank you for all that you do in your workplaces and in your communities to showcase what it means to be an engaged and productive professional. Thank you for being here this evening to celebrate, and always remember--it's a great day to be a Bronco.