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Great Lakes Center for Autism Capital Campaign Celebration

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• Good evening. It is such a pleasure to be here this evening to celebrate the incredible generosity of this community. Together, we've raised much-needed resources for a cause that, for too long went unsupported.

• The success of the capital campaign for the Great Lakes Center for Autism Treatment and Research may just be the leading edge of what I hope is the kind of success we see for such treatment and research in communities across our state. We've been well ahead of the curve on treatment and research issues here in Kalamazoo for many years. Recent developments at the state level have really set the stage for great things to come.

• When the state of Michigan successfully passed legislation in 2012 to mandate insurance coverage for autism treatment, an enormous part of the battle was won. A second problem was quickly identified, however. The lack of trained service providers meant that many families--and most important, the children they love--were facing long waits to be treated by trained professionals. The need was just too great to match the state's capacity for training such professionals.

• This past summer, the Legislature allocated $4 million to Western Michigan University to boost the number of professionals in Michigan who are qualified to provide the needed treatment and assistance to families. Rep. Margaret O'Brien was the champion of this funding effort. She knew there was an internationally known training program "right in her backyard" at Western Michigan University.
• Rep. O'Brien did her homework. She knew that behavior analysis specialists in WMU's Department of Psychology have a 30-plus year history of work with community partners to offer supervised field experience in the area of autism. The University has awarded nearly 400 doctoral degrees and more than a thousand master's degrees to professionals working in developmental disabilities, autism, clinical psychology and industrial organizations psychology—all with a behavior analysis orientation. That's more professionals trained at WMU than by any other university in the nation. But before Michigan mandated insurance coverage for autism treatment, many of those professionals were snatched up by locations around the nation. Now, we'll be able to keep many of them, perhaps right here in Kalamazoo.

• WMU's work goes back to the years-long efforts and research of people like Dr. Richard Mallot, who for years has done research and written on behavior analysis and guided WMU students through a practicum at WoodsEdge Learning Center. That center, in turn, has provided an important local learning environment for children with autism.

• More recently Dr. Stephanie Peterson and Dr. Wayne Fuqua have both worked closely with the Great Lakes Center. The have been leading the effort to take what we do so well and increase our ability to train even more people in the proven techniques of behavioral analysis. They're focusing on high-tech ways to expand and extend our capacity. Just last week, we were able to announce that beginning in January, we will offer a Master of Arts in psychology-behavior analysis at WMU-MetroDetroit, the University's regional location in Royal Oak.

• So the University in your backyard is expanding its training capacity geographically and technically. But we're still very much here and very grateful that all of the people like you who we share this backyard with are committed, caring,
generous and thoughtful with support. Thank you for all that you do to support this area of need.