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State of the Downtown
Dr. John M. Dunn
Nov. 20, 2014

Good afternoon. What a pleasure it is to be here this afternoon and talk about the State of the Downtown--this year of all years. I believe this community's downtown is incredibly vibrant and on the cusp of being one of Michigan's great downtown environments.

- At Western Michigan University, we've been spending some time lately looking closely at the qualities that differentiate our University from others. Earlier this week, I was able to share with a campuswide group my initial take on WMU and Kalamazoo when I was first asked to talk about the presidency here. I knew quite a lot about WMU and the strength of its programs--many of them in or closely related to my academic discipline. But I knew nothing about Kalamazoo.
- It took one trip to Kalamazoo for Linda and me to fall in love with this city and to know what a truly special place it is. I am thankful every day for the qualities that characterize Kalamazoo, because they make Western Michigan University such a desirable place. That's been my mantra for the past seven years, and I think some of the initiatives we've undertaken together have truly enhanced the reputation and vibrancy of both downtown Kalamazoo and the University that is just blocks away.
- When I mentioned this year being particularly significant, I, of course, was referencing the opening this fall of the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. The school is a communitywide initiative and is at home here in downtown Kalamazoo on the W.E. Upjohn M.D. Campus.

- Perhaps no initiative sums up the commitment of WMU and its home community to collaboration like this new School of Medicine. The private medical school at a public university opened in fall 2014 after seven years of communitywide work and planning. The principals in the initiative are WMU and two world-class local teaching hospitals--Borgess Health and Bronson Healthcare. While there are three partners in the day-to day operation of the new school, private donors made the initiative a reality.

We have the great generosity of Ronda Stryker and Bill Johnston as well as Stryker Inc. to thank for bringing this new vision to fruition and allowing us to have the best name for a medical school anywhere in the nation. Literally everywhere we go, the name Stryker draws immediate recognition and speaks to the ideas of quality, innovation and patient-centered care.

- We also have the generosity and support of William U. Parfet and his company MPI to thank for the physical campus that honors the legacy of his great grandfather, W.E. Upjohn. The Upjohn name also evokes our community's outstanding legacy in the life sciences.

- Both the Stryker and Upjohn names set the stage for discovery and entrepreneurial thinking at our young medical school. Moving forward, we see tremendous potential for a medical school that nurtures the best in education, research and commercialization of life science innovation.

- We've structured the medical school to focus on discovery, and we expect such discovery to spark an enormous amount of economic development in the coming years. And we know simply having a medical school fully engaged with the community will lead to a level of health care that few communities can match. Our

medical school will attract bright young prospective physicians to our community. In an age of dwindling numbers of physicians, many of those young people will choose to stay and build their careers here. They will be attracted to this community the same way that you and I were, and they'll stay for those same reasons.

- Those young people--there are 54 in our first class--are coming to Kalamazoo from across the nation. Those 54 were selected from among more than 3,500 applicants from around the country. They are well educated and well rounded and they come from undergraduate backgrounds at 35 colleges and universities. Those 54 students hail from 14 states, and they are, I suspect, in the process of falling in love with Kalamazoo.

- A story was shared with me in late August. I've shared it a couple of times simply because it so perfectly reflects the commitment all of us in this community have made to making the WMU Stryker School of Medicine the world renowned entity we know it can be.

- A few weeks after arriving in Kalamazoo, several of the members of the medical school's inaugural class were having dinner in a downtown Kalamazoo restaurant. I can imagine it was a lively group, and the young people attracted some attention. They struck up a conversation with their waitress, who asked them what brought them to town. Their reply was a simple one. "We're students at the new medical school," they said. At that point the startled young people were treated to an ovation by the rest of the patrons in the restaurant. It was a marvelous moment because everyone in that restaurant "got it."

That moment is reflective of what this community, this University and all of us together have accomplished. It's reflective of just how important this initiative is to our community's downtown and our community's overall vitality.

Enjoy sharing the downtown with the students, faculty and staff of the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. If you have not had a chance to see the campus, take advantage of the next opportunity--the Friday, Dec. 5 ArtHop. The medical school will be one of that event's host organizations and will hold a Community Open House from 5 to 8 p.m. that evening that will include the opportunity for self-guided tours. We want you to be familiar and knowledgeable about this new jewel in the Kalamazoo crown and ready to be an advocate for what is happening here in our wonderful community.

Thank you.