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# Homebuilders Association of West Michigan

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Dr. John M. Dunn  
Homebuilders Association of West Michigan  
Changing West Michigan Forever  
Feb. 17, 2015

**Opening (title slide)**

Thank you, (whoever is doing intro). Good afternoon. It's really very nice to be here with you today. It's been several years since the last time I had a chance to speak with you. In fact, it was 2008--just a few months after I took the reins of Western Michigan University. A lot has happened since then.

My mission today is twofold. First, I want to update you on some recent and very dramatic changes at Western Michigan University. And second, I want to share information about student success that is going to help you in your role as an advocate for opportunity for our young people. It's powerful information and I can think of no better way to unveil it than here among some of the people most knowledgeable about economic development in Michigan.

I'll begin by moving quickly through a number of items, and I want to be respectful of your time. So let's start with two images that have great meaning to me and, I think, are symbolic of Western Michigan University's relationship with its West Michigan community. (Slide 2)

These are two similar images representing a time span of 111 years. The image on top is the oldest image we have of our campus--East Hall just after it was opened in 1904. The image on the bottom is what East Hall will look like at this time next year when we are through renovating the building that is the birthplace of WMU.

Though strikingly similar, the images represent commitment to core principals infused with a staggering amount of change--because change is what we as a University and we as a region are all about.

In 1903, (Slide 3) members of the business community came together and mounted a campaign to convince the Legislature to locate a college for teachers--a Normal School--in West Michigan. The group organized, fundraised and committed a 20-acre site atop Prospect Hill in Kalamazoo as a location for the new school. They also committed funding to build this building--East Hall--as the first home to the new school.

Those business leaders made that effort because they wanted an institution that could be a change agent, an institution that would be good for business as an economic development asset, and a school that could showcase this region's commitment to education.

The school they worked so hard to establish became Western Michigan University. Ever since then, this region and what has become its research University have been allied to bring about change, economic development and world-class educational commitment.

Change, growth and commitment--those are the constants. And today, I'd like to outline how those qualities led to a year like no other in our history. Western Michigan University is a fundamentally changed institution as a result of initiatives that have come to fruition over the past year.

- (Slide 4) The past year has seen us move from a comprehensive research university to one of just 90 universities in the nation with both a medical school and a law school under its aegis and the opportunity to offer legal and medical education to its students now and for many years to come. The Western Michigan University name is now firmly attached to the (click) Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine as well as the (click)

Thomas M. Cooley Law School. Those affiliations have come with new physical resources in our community and new linkages in four other communities--one of them in Florida.

- The addition of a medical school has taken us from being a respected national research university, to one that also attracts, as it has in recent months, visits by such luminaries as the head of the National Institutes of Health, a director from the Food and Drug Administration, and the chair of the board of directors for the Association of American Medical Colleges.

In this era of state budget difficulties and cuts to higher education appropriations, how were we able to add graduate professional education to our offerings? We did it by tapping the private sector and moving to the unusual model of private professional schools within a public university. For the medical school, of course, that meant securing the incredibly generous support of individuals and corporations in this area whose roots are with the names that are synonymous with innovative life sciences--Stryker and Upjohn.

For the law school, we have formally affiliated with a private school that has a similar commitment to the same basic educational values we hold. We are now able to offer the two-signature professional graduate programs--law and medicine--that are characteristic of great national universities.

### **Stryker School of Medicine**

- (Slide 5) Nearly 2,500 people took part in the grand opening of the WMU Stryker School of Medicine last fall, and because I know most of you weren't able to be there, I'll happily share a few images (click) and pertinent facts (click and click) about this initiative that was seven years in the making. In fact, it was early 2008 when I first

talked about the possibility of a medical school in purely speculative terms. It seems like a century ago.

- (Slide 6) This partnership involving Borgess Health, Bronson Healthcare, WMU and the entire Kalamazoo community was launched in August with 54 students from 14 states who earned their undergrad degrees at 35 colleges and universities around the country. Its curriculum is based on team-based medical care--literally preparing doctors for the way they'll work in the 21st century.
- And the new medical school is based on innovation. It is named for the medical device innovator Dr. Homer Stryker, who founded Stryker Inc. (Slide 7). And, the school is at home on the W.E. Upjohn M.D. Campus that bears the names of the person who launched Kalamazoo's involvement in the pharmaceutical industry.

(Slide 8) That innovative spirit (click, click, click) is celebrated and inculcated into the medical school, informing the curriculum. Innovation, research, discovery and new economic development tools are all part of the future here.

As a community and as a region, we'll benefit by having top-notch medical care opportunities, a pipeline of young physicians are eager to start their careers nearby and the likelihood of a plethora of spinoff firms, as the discovery focus of the medical school takes off.

### **Cooley Law School**

Our second monumental change in 2014 (Slide 9) was completion of a formal affiliation (click, click, click) that created the Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School--with campuses in Lansing, Auburn Hills, Grand Rapids and Tampa Bay.

The affiliation grew out of decade-long relationship with the Lansing-based law school that is among the nation's largest and most diverse law schools. We share a common mission and vision with Cooley--both WMU and Cooley are committed to access, diversity and adding value to the lives of the students we serve.

**(Slide 10)** The formal affiliation is only a few months old at this point, but we're already on a path that will bring the beginnings of legal education to Kalamazoo and dramatically expand opportunities for students through such programs as an accelerated degree initiative that will allow students to shave a year off earning both a bachelor's and law degree. We're just beginning to explore some additional benefits of joining legal education and the assets of a research university. Areas being examined include accountancy, intellectual property, the foster care arena and health care.

- 2014 has been notable for a number of other campus accomplishments and changes.

**(Slide 11)** From a University known statewide for its outstanding efforts in the area of sustainability, we have moved to being one honored by the nation's leading collegiate organization Second Nature with its "Climate Leadership Award." And we learned recently WMU has won the U.S. Green Building Council's top higher education award as well--for the success of two decades of sustainability efforts.

- We have moved with determination, over the past year, into the position that puts us among the 25 percent of colleges and universities nationwide that have made the health and well being of the campus community a priority by making the campus tobacco free.

- Our national profile is changing--or rather national assessments of quality in higher education are changing to recognize what institutions like Western Michigan University add to the value to individual lives--and our nation's future.

My favorite recent assessment, for example, comes from Washington Monthly magazine, which assesses universities on the good they are doing for students and the nation when it comes to producing Ph.Ds. and new knowledge, encouraging service, and adding value and success to the lives of individual students. They get it. It's that value-added quality and commitment to the larger community that have long been our hallmarks. This is the second year WMU has appeared on Washington Monthly's list of top-100 national universities and its second appearance in the magazine's more recent "best bang for the buck" category.

### **So much more to tell...**

I could go on and talk about a number of other things as well (Slide 12):

- Our growing interdisciplinary research initiatives in areas that range from transportation, manufacturing technology and product design to developing best practices to keep high risk students on the path to a degree
- Our training and advocacy work for families dealing with autism--just funded with \$4 million from the Legislature
- Our increasing international enrollment that is making an enormous contribution to this region's economy.
- Our Business Technology and Research Park that is now full after welcoming an international design center this year.
- A celebrated College of Aviation that just hit its 75th anniversary. We were in aviation education just 36 years after the Wright Brothers took their first flight.

Those items and the ones I described earlier have a profound impact on the lives of everyone in our region--everyone in this room.

One way we've had an enormous impact on the region in recent years is through the extraordinary enhancements to our physical infrastructure over the past five years and moving forward for the next two, we've undertaken nearly \$300 million in new and renovated facilities for instruction, student living and dining, our region's archives and

other needs. (Slide 13) I've already showed you images of some of that work--the medical school campus and our new alumni center. (Click X4) Here are just a few more. Those facilities have all resulted in hundreds of jobs for West Michigan builders, architects, contractors and a host of suppliers.

Our impact is all about constancy and change. (Slide 14) We're actively engaged in working with both existing and emerging industries that are vital the region. We're also emerging as a critical draw for the emergence of West Michigan as a design mecca. Our Business Technology and Research Park is home to longtime medical device design firm Tekna. Last year, Newell Rubbermaid chose to open its international design center at the park.

But by far, Western Michigan University's most important contribution to the well being of all West Michigan communities is the body of alumni who who stay in Michigan to live and work. We have 70,000 alumni in West Michigan--some 25,000 in Kalamazoo County alone.

This is the point at which I want to share some really important information about our next generation with you. It is information that you need and information that will allow you to counter with some real facts the next time someone tries to tell you or your sons and daughters that earning a college degree is no longer worth it--that it won't lead to a good job.

That's a growing myth in the nation, and one that shows up in various stories (one in the Washington Post last week) that focus on the supposed inability of recent graduates to find jobs. I am pleased to counter it with data from my University.

We started five years ago to seriously track our graduates. We needed to know the level of success they found after graduation because we needed to know how effective we are



as an institution. It's difficult data to capture. What I'm sharing with you today is the post-graduation success data for our entire population of 2013-14 graduates-- undergraduate and graduate. We have data on nearly 70 percent of the more than 5,000 students who graduated, and the data illustrates their success within three months of completing their degree. Let me first point out that three quarters of the students (74 percent) stayed right here in their home state.

**(Slide 15)** The data show that more than **89 percent** are successful. Success is defined as "actively engaged."

**(Slide 16)** That means they're working, continuing their education, serving in the military, self-employed or working part time. More than 80 percent of those working are employed in their field of study.

**(Slide 17)** And the median salary range for new working alums is \$45,000 to \$50,000.

That 89 percent active engagement figure is the average. The \$45,000 to \$50,000 salary figure is the median. You should know that more than half of our students had starting salaries of more than \$45,000, and six percent were above \$80,000.

There are multiple areas of study in which not only are 90 percent-plus actively engaged, but their median salaries are also above \$60,000. Chemical engineers, for instance, are at a 95 percent engagement level, with average salary levels of \$60-70,000. Our celebrated integrated supply management major (No. 5 or No. 2 in the nation, depending on the ranking tool) has 91 percent of alumni engaged and earning in the \$50-55,000 range. We're tracking high numbers for occupational therapists (91 percent and \$55K-plus), with similar outcomes for nursing and physician assistant graduates.

But before you succumb to another popular myth that says post-graduate success is for technical and health care fields only, let me assure you that some of our highest engagement rates are in fields like philosophy, religion and women' studies.

We have more than 250 degree programs, and you can find the engagement and salary figures for every one of them at this website. (Slide 18) In addition to the kind of detail I've just shared, you'll also find a sample list of employers, by major, and the size of the surveyed student group for each college and each major.

This is the kind of information we all need understand to counter the myths we hear every day and to help showcase our region and our universities' accomplishments, service and commitment.

I will close by saying Western Michigan University and this region, together, have lived up to the vision that group of business leaders had back in 1903--economic development, commitment to education and, above all, creating a change agent for the region.

- So, let's return to those initial two images. (Slide 19) for a final look at those images that represent both change AND a sense of constancy and fidelity to the West Michigan region that gave Western Michigan University life. Change, in the end, is what a vibrant community and a vibrant university can and must offer its citizens and stakeholders.

In closing, I'd like to invite you to visit the campus in Kalamazoo. If you're an alum, it will renew your Bronco pride. If you've never really gotten to know WMU, I guarantee you'll be blown away by what you find and the sheer joy of the "heads up" community you'll find at Western Michigan University

Again, I want to be respectful of your time constraints and provide the opportunity for any questions you may have. Thank you for your attention and interest. I'd like to open the floor to any questions. (Slide 20)