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Icon Dedication

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• Good morning. Let me add my welcome to this ceremony at which we'll dedicate the iconic work that puts the finishing touch on the pedestrian mall that has become our campus outdoor gathering place. This is a celebration of the values outlined by our University seal. And it is a celebration of the community ties that gave birth to Western Michigan University and continue to touch all that we do.

• The Seal and the Gathering tree was created by a "gathering" of community members that started with campus individuals who wanted to commission an artistic representation of our community values. They identified Kalamazoo artist Joshua Diedrich who translated that vision. When it came time to physically implement that work, we turned to 10 firms--most from the immediate community--to put their talents to work to produce and install the work we dedicate today. Those companies are listed in your program. Please join me in a round of applause for their work.

• This is a small-scale example of what this University has done throughout its existence. We will continue our commitment to community well into the future.

• As a matter of fact, right now, there are area contractors, construction workers and artisans engaged in building two wonderful new residence halls--learning environments--for our students just behind these buildings on my left. And atop Prospect Hill on the East Campus, community members are a part of the effort to literally transform the birthplace of WMU, East Hall, so that building can resume its life as an active part of our University and our community.
• And in a few weeks, we'll launch a new initiative as we build a spectacular new dining hall in Goldsworth Valley. All of this work provides area jobs and celebrates the WMU and Kalamazoo commitment to both function and form.

• I've been looking at all the faces that Joshua included in a very subtle way on branches and leaves of this Gathering Tree. They are a combination of those whose names are strongly associated with this university as well as representations of the many whose names may not be recognized but who have contributed to the life and spirit of this community. They are those who, in Joshua's words, "make the University a living body." Thank you, Joshua, for capturing that spirit and making it central to your artistic vision.

• I've always been intrigued by our seal and its elements. Thank you all for giving it new prominence at the center of our campus. We will gather in this spot for many years to come.

• And now, it's time to complete the work by formally making the total package a reality. I'll ask Pete Strazdas to return and organize the principals for our ribbon-cutting and for the moment we bring all of the elements of the Seal and the Gathering Tree to life.