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Post-Service Reception for Dr. Elson S. Floyd

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Good afternoon. I bring with me the sympathy of the Western Michigan University Community. We share your grief, but more important we share in the celebration of the life of Elson Floyd, and we revel in the absolute joy that characterized his role as a university president, colleague and friend.

Elson Floyd was president of WMU before he was also "E-Flo." But the characteristics that made him beloved by students were in evidence from the first days of his first presidency. Within his first months at WMU, the campus was alive with stories about how much he cared about students at the school he called a "student centered research university."

One story that lingers still is about Elson, the North Carolina native, experiencing his first Michigan winter. Driving across campus one afternoon, Elson spotted a young man struggling through the snowdrifts in sneakers. Stopping, the 42-year-old Elson did his best stern father imitation and asked, "Where are your boots?" The student replied that he didn't own any, so Elson reached into his back seat to retrieve his own boots and gave them to the young man. That powerful story re-emerged as the WMU community was adjusting to the sad news of his death.

I had the pleasure of getting to know Elson Floyd at first because we shared the common bond of being a WMU president. We met at national professional board meetings and usually sat together at meetings so we could talk about what was happening at each other's schools--most recently sharing stories of the medical schools we were launching. He maintained a love for and interest in Western Michigan University and loved hearing about campus initiatives--many of which had their roots in his presidency.
One of Elson's first initiatives at WMU grew out of a meeting with a dean frustrated over stalled plans to build a new engineering facility. Elson assured him the plan would move forward. "You will get that new building," he said.

Five years later, the Floyd promise was realized. A spectacular new 300,000-square-foot engineering building opened on a new campus--but it didn't stop there. That engineering campus was surrounded by a Business Technology and Research Park that today has more than 40 corporate business partners with some 800 employees in high-tech jobs working with our faculty and students. That was part of Elson Floyd's commitment as well.

That marvelous engineering building wasn't formally named until July, when our Board of Trustees approved an appropriate name--Elson S. Floyd Hall. On Oct. 16, we will welcome Carmento Floyd and other members of the Floyd family back to campus for a formal dedication of the building's new identity.

That will serve as the tangible reminder on our campus of Elson Floyd. But I am reminded of the comment author Damon Runyon made as he neared death.

"You can keep the bronze and stone and give me one man to remember me just once a year," he said.

I think we can do Elson Floyd one better than that--or a thousand times better. He will be remembered.

Thank you.