Joe Reish Reception/Roast

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Good evening.
I’m so pleased to be here tonight and a part of this particular sendoff for Dean Joe Reish. A few weeks ago, I missed the wine opening event at which Joe’s long career was celebrated campuswide, but in the greetings I sent, I was able to share that I thought “uncorked” was standard operating procedure for our friend and colleague. I stand by that assessment.

I truly cannot think of anyone with as many identities as Joe—scholar, linguist, professor, dean, knight, toastmaster, United Way advocate, horseman, librarian, vocalist, biker and Bronco. And sometimes, Joe has been known to bring more than one of those identities to the table. Think of it as a type of academic multiple personality disorder.

Just this morning, for instance, in reviewing some marketing materials, Joe waxed eloquent about how much he liked language that spoke of his beloved university as a place of “unbridled excellence.” The horseman in Joe was compelled to proudly point out that Broncos are by their very nature “unbridled,” free and proud. But the scholar and linguist in Joe was flummoxed moments later when he was challenged by a colleague with the question. “How then, Joe, does a good Bronco ‘grab the reins’?”

Joe is still pondering that question, but I can tell you that grabbing the reins, crop, whip, spurs and a host of other tools came naturally to Joe in one of his longtime WMU roles—that of United Way campus campaign director. I can honestly say no one in my memory of United Way advocates at this or other institutions has ever
been able to generate the kind of anticipation that I witnessed during Senior Leadership Team meetings when the group knew Joe was about to make the ask on behalf of United Way. In most settings, the United Way pitch is a lot like going to the dentist. You know it’s a good thing, but you don’t always look forward to it.

During Joe’s United Way reign, everyone wondered which Joe Reish would show up to make the pitch—the cowboy who would fling his whip on the table, the cheerleader with appropriately placed physical enhancements or the black leather-clad biker/biker chick who would roar up on the back of a Harley.

That’s been the beauty of Joe’s career. He always like to bring a little flair to the task. He has never been boring and he has immersed himself in whatever the task at hand might be. Just imagine the kind of schemes that mind will dream up in retirement. I think the Emeriti Council is already crafting their own version of WMU Alerts just to be ready for the sea of change they see headed their way.

Joe, you have put your stamp on so much at this University. I am watching to see what you do next and how high you set the bar for those who join you among the ranks of retirees in future years. Thank you for so many wonderful moments and for decades of magnificent service—with all of your multiple personalities. May every one of them enjoy the years ahead!