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10-18-2016

WMU/FSW/Charlotte County Alliance Celebration

John M. Dunn

Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

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WMU ScholarWorks Citation

Dunn, John M., "WMU/FSW/Charlotte County Alliance Celebration" (2016). *WMU President John Dunn*. 623.

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WMU/FSW/Charlotte County Alliance Celebration
WMU President John M. Dunn
2:30 p.m. Oct. 18, 2016

Opening

Good Afternoon. Thank you, Dr. Wright, for that kind introduction. Gov. Scott, thank you for being with us this afternoon. It's such a pleasure to be here with county government officials, economic development executives, representatives from Sen. Nelson's and Rep. Eagle's staff, and our new colleagues from Florida South Western State College. I'm proud to have a delegation of Western Michigan University Broncos here with me--from Kalamazoo *and* from Charlotte County.

In fact, Charlotte County has long been Bronco country. Outside of the Midwest, the state of Florida has the third largest population of Bronco alumni, and this particular community is home to a large number of our alumni. They are supportive and pleased to see us in town. There's a real affinity between our two states that may well have something to do with geography. It's hard not to notice that while Michigan and Florida are some 1,400 miles apart, they are distinctive for one important trait. Our states are the nation's two major peninsulas, completely surrounded by the water resources that are so important to our economies. For us, Florida feels like home, and the welcome we've received from this community has only enhanced that feeling.

About Western Michigan University

As we went into this partnership, I know many of the first encounters with Charlotte County residents revolved around what Western Michigan University could bring to the table. This is an appropriate time for a recap.

Who are we--in addition to being home to one of only (*number after Saturday?*) undefeated and bowl-eligible football teams in the nation?

Here is "quick read" description of our university. WMU is a national research university enrolling more than 23,000 students from across the United States and 100 other countries. Founded in 1903, it is a learner-centered, discovery-driven and globally engaged public university with more than 250 academic programs. For 26 years, *U.S. News & World Report* has included WMU on its list of "best national universities." Perhaps more meaningful to us, *Washington Monthly* has ranked us as No. 64 on its list of the top 303 national universities when it comes to producing graduates and research that will make a real difference to the nation.

We have a number of points of pride I could share, and many of them revolve around our marquee programs. During basketball season, I often tell incoming students that if there were a "final four" for individual academic programs, we'd be in it every year for programs as varied as aviation, supply chain management, jazz studies, engineering management, and geosciences. And I must note, because it's so critical to this partnership, that seven of our health care graduate programs are ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as among the nation's top 100--four of those are in the top 50.

Why a partnership with Charlotte County and Florida South West State?

Why does a partnership linking Charlotte County, Florida South West State and WMU make sense? That's an easy answer.

Over many months of discussion, it became clear to us all that not only does such a partnership make sense, it provides new opportunities for all three organizations to make a tangible difference in the lives of students and those who call this region home.

Specifically, the partnership will mean new opportunities for research that will lead to positive aging. Such research that will also address environmental issues that both our states face. The partnership will provide an opportunity to integrate WMU programs with those of a wonderful educational partner--Florida South Western State College. That integration will enhance both schools' ability to serve students. And it will, of course, boost the work force preparation that this community has identified as critical to employers' future needs.

The WMU vision for Florida

There are some basic elements to the Western Michigan University vision for this partnership in Florida.

- First, of course, is **aviation**. This will be at the core of our initial work with FSW. With more than 75 years of experience in educating aviation professionals, WMU is focused squarely on preparing young people to be among the more than 1 million new commercial pilots and aviation maintenance professionals the industry will need over the next 15 years.

Aviation is a top-three program for economic development in Florida, and this state has one critical quality that will allow maximum efficiency in preparing new pilots--good weather. We expect to bring students here to boost their flight hours, and we expect to see incredible success in our partnership with FSW to train Florida enrollees.

The students in both programs will reap the benefits of studying in a program that is a world leader in aviation safety training and has been recognized for decades as one of the top three programs in the nation. (As an aside, I'd like to note that this past weekend, our precision flight team, the Sky Broncos qualified to compete in the annual National Intercollegiate Flight Association

championship. They have qualified to do that for more than 30 consecutive years.)

- The second basic element of our partnership should be labeled **wellness and positive aging**. Charlotte County has the second oldest population in the nation. And WMU has world-class programs focused on some of the key health issues facing that aging population. We have programs that support positive aging and explore the biology of aging--vision therapy for those with macular degeneration, geriatric behavior therapy and music therapy. Our health programs have a long history of partnering with the private sector in the communities we serve. In our home community, Kalamazoo, we were able to leverage private-sector partnerships to establish a new medical school--a rare example of a private medical school within a public university.

- The third major partnership element is sustainability--an area in which Western Michigan University has made extraordinary progress establishing best practices and understanding and combatting emerging issues. Let me give you two examples. First, is the fact that we established the nation's first academic program in Freshwater Science and Sustainability to prepare students to be stewards of and advocates for our precious natural resource. And second, our geoscientists are doing international research on algae blooms--the very issue that plagued Florida this year.

Looking ahead

I just laid out three areas of focus for the launch of our alliance. But the potential for the future is really unlimited. As we work closely with industry, more areas of focus will quickly emerge. They already have, because the initial areas of focus just scratch the surface of those 250-plus academic programs I mentioned earlier. Among the

WMU representatives here today are leaders in programs in which area industry leaders are already expressing interest.

- Our Integrated Supply Management program is ranked among the top five such programs in the nation. Its unique combination of supply chain management, engineering, information technology, logistics and business education produces graduates ready to take leadership positions in a variety of industries that include food production, aeronautics and engineering.
- Our Organizational Learning and Performance master's degree program is focused on leading effective change in an age of globalization. This human resource development program focuses on employee engagement and performance as well as the learning technologies that can be used to accomplish individual and organizational learning.

Closing

We are off to a strong start. We can't predict the future of this alliance, but the collegiality, deep respect and commitment that are part of our relationship today tell us that our partnership will be a success--and that success will mean life is better for our communities.

At Western Michigan University, we're fond of saying, "It's a great day to be a Bronco. Today truly is.

Thank you.

(Exactly 10 minutes)