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Kalamazoo Russian Festival

John M. Dunn
Western Michigan University, john.dunn@wmich.edu

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• Good morning. It's my pleasure to welcome you to the Kalamazoo Russian Festival and to the campus of Western Michigan University.

• We have with us today visitors, performers and vendors from across the Midwest, and beyond. We also have guests from the Russian School 60, an English-speaking institution in Pushkin. We extend a special welcome to these students and their parents who have traveled here to Kalamazoo to add to this year’s program. We are happy to have you here with us to celebrate this celebration that has its roots in the unique partnership between the city of Kalamazoo and our Russian sister city of Pushkin.

• This event began as an annual party in a private home in Kalamazoo and now attracts visitors from around the nation. Throughout the years, Western Michigan University has been a willing and constant partner in this effort. A number of our faculty and staff members and their families have been instrumental in staging this campus and community tradition.

• This festival grew out of the Kalamazoo-Pushkin Partnership. That relationship started in the early 1990s and remains today a humanitarian organization, a cultural interest group, and an ethnic network. Today, the partnership is known as the Kalamazoo Russian Culture Association.

• When the partnership was started, much of the effort was aimed at meeting immediate medical needs in Pushkin. This festival raises funds for the partnership's
humanitarian projects in the city still, and over the years, as this event has grown, the proceeds have been used for a women's health clinic, an art school for the deaf, an orphanage and a hospital for children with orthopedic problems and disabilities and more.

• We're a University that prides itself in being learner centered, discovery driven and globally engaged. This community partnership is truly a global engagement model for our students and a point of pride for this entire region.

• Kalamazoo's medical community was deeply involved in beginning this partnership and remains part of its core base of support. As our University moves more deeply into medical education, I hope we'll be able to continue to add value to the effort.

Please enjoy the music and dance performances, try the wonderful Russian cuisine and sample the drama and academic presentations. Take advantage of this opportunity to shop, play a little chess and admire the work of artisans. I also invite you to explore all corners the fantastic Western Michigan University campus. And plan to come back again in future years.

Thank you for visiting and enjoy your day.