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Air Zoo Science Innovation Hall of Fame

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• Good evening! Welcome to the 2017 Science Innovation Hall of Fame Gala. This annual event has become one of many favorite celebrations of all that we do extraordinarily well in our community. When it comes to science education and how that will impact the future, we are second to none. This annual celebration is also a chance to honor Michigan's legacy of aviation by singling out individuals on whose shoulders today's aviation professionals stand.

• To borrow a phrase from our colleagues here at the Air Zoo, tonight is about celebrating our region's best and brightest educators, students and aerospace innovators. We're really honoring those who have made enormous contributions to the aerospace world in the past as well as those who well may lead it in the future.

• This is the fourth year this gala has been held--and the fourth year Western Michigan University has been a partner in this important celebration. When we were first approached by the Air Zoo to get behind this event, it was an easy decision to make--a "no brainer"--although that may be a strange descriptor for an event that's all about innovation and bright young people. The event dovetails with WMU's 78-year history and international reputation in aviation as well as the University's commitment to the same core values and disciplines the Air Zoo promotes. The disciplines are known collectively as STEAM—science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics.

• As educators, many of us have long promoted the importance of STEM disciplines, but we've also known that STEM disciplines alone are only part of the answer to the challenges our nation faces. We're preparing a future work force and
a future citizenry. STEM education only reaches its full potential with the infusion of the creative side of the equation--the "A."

• It's been said that "Policy makers and politicians want more STEM. Educators want more STEAM." I think that's right. Technology is critically important to our future. But those of us who work with young people and prepare the next generation of scientists know that technical knowledge needs the added boost of creativity, design, applied problem solving and critical thinking to be most effective.

• As famed Harvard-based education professor Howard Gardiner once said about the STEM acronym: "I have no hesitation in saying we need to add the letter 'A'...An education devoid of the arts...is an empty half-brain kind of education."

• Aviation, STEM education and the arts are all part of WMU's DNA--they're part of Kalamazoo's DNA as well, and we are fortunate to have a resource like the Air Zoo, which is one of the only Smithsonian-affiliated aerospace and science centers in the nation. We know that the best time to capture a child’s interest in STEAM topics is during elementary school. Just look around you, this evening. Every experience in this marvelous facility is designed to inspire children to fall in love with these subjects and become curious about future careers associated with them.

• Our colleagues here at the AirZoo are passionate about creating inspirational experiences and leveling the educational playing field by providing scholarships allowing low-income families to access Air Zoo programming. This annual event is their largest fundraiser and helped the Air Zoo last year provide scholarship assistance to some 21,000 young people in local communities.
• I hope you enjoy seeing the WMU aviation and engineering displays this evening. I want you to know, as well, that this evening as we gather here, WMU's Sky Broncos aviation team is at Ohio State University finishing up the 2017 National Intercollegiate Flying Association National Championship. Our team has qualified for that event in each of the past nearly 30 years, last winning the national title in 2002. We're waiting to hear how they've done this year.

• On behalf of everyone at Western Michigan University I'd like to offer our congratulations to tonight's inductees into the Michigan Aviation Hall of Fame. It is an incredible honor for an individual who has made important contributions to the industry. I can tell you from experience how gratifying it was to have our College of Aviation inducted as an organization in 2008.

• And my personal and our University's collective congratulations go to each of this evenings teachers and students being honored for innovation and excellence in the STEAM disciplines. We are so proud of you and what you've accomplished.

• Thank you, and enjoy the celebration.

(About 6 minutes)