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Betty Kocher Memorial Tribute
President Emeritus John M. Dunn
Dec. 20, 2017
Heritage Hall, 3-6 p.m.

I have been given the honor of sharing a few words and thoughts about Betty Kocher. Where to begin is difficult, given a life that included 35 years of loyal and devoted service to WMU, being a mother to two wonderful sons and, of course, the loving and supportive mate to Bruce.

My time with Betty began in 2007 when I was asked to meet the search committee at the Detroit Airport to interview for the position of President. As many of you know, the committee had been meeting with hopeful candidates for two grueling days and I was the 13th and final candidate they would interview. That afternoon, Betty was the first person I met -- she greeted me in the hallway with a smile and gave me a brief orientation about the upcoming interview. For some reason, I was struck by the feeling that she was pulling for me. Later, I learned, as Betty was fond of saying, she knew I had to be the best choice because she and I shared the same birthday, October the 3rd. Whether it was the birthday coincidence or just comfortable vibes between us, Betty's easy banter and calm command of the entire search process were reassurances I appreciated as I stepped through the door to meet the Committee...in the not-so-lucky Number 13 slot in the lineup of candidates.

Actually, that initial encounter in Detroit affirmed my belief in Western Michigan University as a first-class institution. I headed back to Carbondale thinking that if other Broncos were half as genial, kind and caring as Betty Kocher, WMU was exactly where I wanted to be. And, as history proved, my good fortune of serving

as this institution's eighth president was, by far, the most exciting, productive and memory-filled years of my career in education.

The second major encounter with Betty occurred when Linda and I were asked to return to campus for a second round of interviews. Given that we were here over Easter, Betty and Bruce invited us to dinner with them at Fieldstone. Wow, what an evening of great food and exceptional company. Again, I saw the devotion and affection that Betty had for her work, her family and the wonderful Kalamazoo community.

I think we can all agree that Betty was the consummate storyteller. She paid close attention to details and earned the reputation as a true WMU historian, especially when it came to its presidents and trustees. Betty proudly proclaimed that she had served in various campus roles during the terms of all presidents, except Dwight Waldo. Something tells me that, had Dr. Waldo ever met Betty, he would have stayed on the job a few more years just to ensure that she was part of his leadership team.

I had the pleasure of working with Betty during the nine years leading to her retirement. She proved to be very loyal, a good counsel, and extremely helpful in providing the chronology and details of Board activities and matters related to the University. I never heard her issue a negative word about others, not that she did not have an opinion! In fact, she was a master at offering advice without doing so directly. She had a mind of her own and the confidence to insist that all matters involving the Board of Trustees were handled with professionalism and aplomb.

She served the Trustees, current and former, extremely well. I venture to say that most Trustees came to view Betty not as an employee but almost as a family member. She treated the Trustees with respect and they responded in kind. Despite my personal effort to have Betty call me John, she simply ignored my request and always referred to me as Mr. President. This little act served me well in both good times and not-so-good times, when making a tough decision, I could always count on Betty's support and reminder - you are Mr. President.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge Betty's family, for it was her loving and attentive husband, children and grandchildren that fueled Betty on a daily basis as she tackled her demanding role in University administration. Husband Bruce was always there to help, particularly in the later years. He could be counted on to lend a hand with last-minute Board meeting preparations or commencement exercises, for as many as four ceremonies in one day.

And, then there were Betty's two sons: Michael and Thomas. Betty was so proud of their character and accomplishments. Michael, Betty kept me and others well apprised of your many international assignments and accolades. And when you blessed the Kocher family with your lovely wife, Seriah, and then two really handsome grandsons, Betty's love and pride simply could not be contained. We were presented with photos and heard accounts of her precious grandkids' activities on a regular basis.

And, Tom, Betty's affection for you was well known and well deserved. Betty-- and Bruce too--have been truly blessed by your attentive devotion and encouragement, especially in recent years when health and mobility issues crept into the picture. As I struggle these days to accept a few mobility limitations of my

own, I know well the value of a loving, helpful family. I know it meant the world to Betty.

I speak for many when I say that Betty Kocher gave much to Western Michigan University and the trustees and presidents with whom she served. Thank you, Betty. You have made a difference that will be remembered and appreciated for years to come.