WMU medical school grand opening celebrates community collaboration

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KALAMAZOO, MI — It was the grand opening of the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine — but it was a celebration of the whole community.

More than 1,500 people attended the official grand opening of the medical school held Thursday afternoon at the school located in downtown Kalamazoo. Faculty, students, community representatives, family and friends filled the auditorium, lecture halls, tent and nearby movie theaters to hear dignitaries talk about the school, which has been open to students since August.

WMU President John Dunn talked about the community building blocks that allowed the school to take root in Kalamazoo — the two teaching hospitals Borgess Medical Center and Bronson Methodist Hospital, city support, city leadership and generous philanthropy.

He singled out William Johnston and Ronda Stryker, granddaughter of the school's namesake, for their cash donation of $100 million and William U. Parfet, who as CEO of MPI Research donated the building that houses the school. He is the great-grandson of Upjohn Co. founder W.E. Upjohn, after whom the campus is named.

In a video, Johnston said it will take 20 years to realize the full impact the school has on the region but that this is an aspiration moment.

"I'm certain there is another Homer Stryker out there, who will take whatever challenge is in front of them and create a solution for that," he said. "They are going to create solutions for better health care, better outcomes for patients."

Also in the video, Parfet praised Western for adapting the building to meet the needs of the curriculum and the students and said the school will help maintain a vital downtown. "I am proud and anxious to see Kalamazoo reinvent itself. Now, we're going to make physicians. It's a great need of our society and I'm glad we're addressing it right here in Kalamazoo."

Keynote speaker Dr. A. Lorris Betz, the senior vice president emeritus of health sciences at the University of Utah, urged the first class of medical students to look to the example of Homer Stryker for inspiration in their medical careers, telling them to cherish the perseverance and hard work it takes to build a medical career, to be unrelenting
in their desire to improve their work and to embrace their obligation to care for all in need.

The opening of the school is an important moment for the nation, he said. As the chair of the board of the Association of American Medical Colleges, he sees the nation’s worsening shortage of physicians. "You are important partners with us moving toward our dream that all Americans will be able to access a doctor when they need one."

After the ceremony, guests were invited to tour the hospital, which recently completed a $68 million renovation, which included a new entryway with atrium, the creation of two team-based learning lecture halls, and one of the nation's newest and largest medical simulation centers.

Portage City Council member Nasim Ansari and his wife Rashida Ansari were both impressed with the facility. Rashida Ansari said it was amazing to see the technological advancements in comparison to when her son went to medical school in the late 1990s.

"We're very fortunate to have this type of program in our community, "Nasim Ansari said. "It's going to be a gem."

State Rep. Sean McCann said, "The school represents all kinds of possibilities in so many areas: academia, economics, innovation and prestige for the community. And, its core advancement of medicine will help the health of our community, our state and our world."

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