On behalf of the University of Minnesota, I want to thank you for your service to the University and to our community. I'm delighted to welcome you to Eastcliff to celebrate that service.

This is my fourth time addressing your group. You were one of the very first groups I spoke to in 2011. That first year, I told you how much I admired you as active volunteers and talked a little about my background as a committed volunteer. I mentioned that, since I was starting a new full-time volunteer job here at the University, it was ironic that I wouldn’t have time to volunteer the ways I had in the past.

The second year I told you that I had been wrong about that. Have you ever thought you didn’t have time to volunteer? I’ll bet you were like me: You discovered volunteering is in your blood, so you found the time. I told you about my new volunteer opportunities, and then about some remarkable University of Minnesota students and how they are volunteering.

Last year I discovered even more of the many and varied volunteer tasks that members of your group do, and do very well. I shared some of that list with all of you, as you may not know everything others are doing and might be inspired to
move in new directions.

This year, I was wondering what I could tell you that might be new! We know that volunteering has been rightly called the glue that holds a community together. We know that volunteering has enormous benefits to the volunteer as well as to the community. But being we are at a major research university, I thought we should consider research on volunteerism.

I remember reading years ago about research done in the 1980s that led to the “grandmother hypothesis.”¹ Scientists have wondered why human females outlive their fertility, while other animals don’t (with the exception of one type of whale, but that’s another story). Professor Kristen Hawkes, an anthropologist at the University of Utah, was doing fieldwork with the Hadza, a partly hunter-gatherer tribe in Tanzania, who live like our early ancestors. She had a revelation: “There they were right in front of us. These old ladies who were just dynamos,” she said.² The community depended on the work of the older women who had “retired” from child-rearing. Their contributions were absolutely vital to the success of the tribe. This seems to describe the role of retiree volunteers very well. You are vital to our community. Now I realize some of you
gentlemen may not appreciate being called grandmothers, so I looked for other research to share with you.

Research from the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteerism and happiness. They found that the more people volunteered, the happier they were. ³

As volunteers, we know that intuitively, but we may wonder if happy people are just more likely to volunteer. A study from the University of Zurich solved that riddle after the collapse of East Germany and its infrastructure of volunteering. The researchers compared people who had lost their opportunity to volunteer to people who were able to keep volunteering. They found “robust evidence that volunteers are more satisfied with their lives than non-volunteers.” ⁴

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) has compiled findings from two decades of research for a report titled “The Health Benefits of Volunteering: A Review of Recent Research.” ⁵

This report cites many studies that establish a strong relationship between volunteering and health. Here are the key findings, quoting directly from the report:

- *Older volunteers are most likely to receive greater health*
benefits from volunteering.

- Volunteers must meet a “volunteering threshold” to receive significant health benefits. (Volunteering once or twice may feel good, but volunteering needs to be regular and sustained to benefit your health in measurable ways.)

- Volunteering leads to greater life satisfaction and lower rates of depression.

- Volunteering and physical well-being are part of a positive reinforcing cycle.

- Evidence suggests the possibility that the best way to prevent poor health in the future, which could be a barrier to volunteering, is to volunteer.

- Individuals who volunteer live longer.

- State volunteer rates is strongly connected with the physical health of the states’ population. (Two graphs in the report show Minnesota as one of the top three states for volunteer rates at near 40 percent and correspondingly as having the lowest heart disease rate and the second lowest age-adjusted mortality rate.6)
In conclusion, stay healthy, stay happy, keep volunteering!


2. Quote is from http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/30/menopause-natures-way-older-women-sexually-attractive

3. HelpGuide.org Available at http://www.helpguide.org/life/volunteer_opportunities_benefits_volunteering.htm#wellbeing


5. The Corporation for National and Community Service www.nationalservice.org