

Thank you, Wendy. Good afternoon, I am Linda Keene, Chief Executive Officer for the Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys.

When I joined River Valleys as CEO in February of 2008, we were just beginning the process of merging five legacy councils into one organization. Today, I am pleased to say that the basic integration and realignment of our operations has largely been achieved. This work has been challenging in many ways, but we are beginning to see a payoff in terms of new programming opportunities for girls and more resources available to support our volunteers.

On behalf of River Valleys, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your cooperation and adaptability during these times of change. We ask that you continue to work with us as we move into the next phase of this long-term change process – which is positioning the organization for future growth. Your input and ideas will be critically important in helping to move Girl Scouts towards more flexible and innovative ways to serve girls in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

You have already heard from Wendy about the financial results of the past year. In a very difficult economy that had a negative impact on our revenues, River Valleys pulled off a rare feat – we were able to reduce the rate of membership decline, maintain our core programs and services for girls and demonstrate good financial stewardship that positions us well for the future. Because realignment occurred when it did, we were well down the path of streamlining operations and reducing expenses when the tough economic conditions hit. In this, we were better positioned than many of our

non-profit peers who were forced to cut essential services and some who face the prospect of closing their doors. Without realignment, many Girl Scout councils – both locally and nationally – could have met a similar fate. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the vision and timing of our national leadership in driving organizational change was indeed fortunate.

Real leadership is often about facing brutal truths and making difficult choices – and these times present many “teachable moments” for those engaged with preparing girls to become the leaders of tomorrow. We must show girls how to research and understand the factors driving a need for change, analyze alternatives, and make fact-based decisions. We need to demonstrate for them how to communicate our differences in a productive and respectful manner. And we must avoid framing complex issues in simplistic terms that play on emotions and suggest that unpleasant realities can somehow be ignored. Our country would certainly be making more progress in solving the challenging problems of our time if all of the people in leadership positions had been taught these things and acted accordingly. In modeling these leadership behaviors within Girl Scouting, we can equip girls with critical skills they need to make the world a better place.

During the past year, River Valleys’ Board of Directors stepped up to the leadership challenge of dealing with a property portfolio that is too large and too costly for our needs. Bridging the gap between property-related revenues and operating costs has long been an issue for Girl Scout councils – well before realignment – and needed to be addressed in order to develop a sustainable financial model for the future.

In June, the Board established a volunteer-led task group to develop a long-term property recommendation for River Valleys, including all camps and service centers.

When selecting task force members, we sought out individuals with an appreciation of the value of camping and outdoor programming to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience and a strong commitment to preserving a variety of high-quality options for the girls of our council. After many months of thoughtful research and rigorous debate, the task group presented its recommendations to the River Valleys' board in mid-December. Upon review and discussion, the board found the results of task group's work to be compelling and unanimously approved their recommendations. The decisions were made public a short time ago, and, as most of you know, included decommissioning three River Valleys' properties: Camps Greenwood, Piper Hill and Rolling Ridges. The recommendations also included exploring the transfer of operations for Camp Sanderson to our northern sister council, Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin Lakes and Pines.

The volunteer property task group should be congratulated for coming up with a plan that provides our membership with continued access to a full range of outdoor program opportunities – including resident camp, day camps, service unit encampments and events – while significantly reducing the operating deficit associated with our properties. They clearly understood the necessity of changing our model, evaluated alternatives and exhibited courage, confidence and character in making the difficult decisions required to preserve the ability to provide these opportunities for River Valleys' Girl

Scouts into the future. You will be hearing more about the work of the property task group when Sharon Hollatz comes to the podium, but I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to thank these volunteers personally for their leadership, the time they invested in this project and for always keeping the best interests of the girls at the center of their efforts.

Another leadership challenge we are actively working to address is providing a relevant and engaging program experience that meets the needs of today's girls in the face of increased competition for their time and attention. To do this, we must also support our volunteers with the tools, training and resources you need in order to be effective.

In the fall of 2008, we introduced the new GSUSA Leadership Journeys which were designed to provide a consistent, intentional and developmentally appropriate leadership curriculum focused around contemporary issues of importance to girls. The Journeys were accompanied by detailed Leader Guides which contained valuable ideas and resources for implementing the Journeys curriculum with girls.

In the fall of 2009, River Valleys created and implemented Program Essentials in response to feedback from leaders that they could use additional assistance in understanding how to integrate Leadership Journeys with other traditional Girl Scouting activities. In providing a "road map" for planning a well-rounded Girl Scout year, Program Essentials also simplified the start-up process for new leaders – which we hope will lead to improved retention.

And we are not resting on our laurels. River Valleys is doing groundbreaking work to develop the very best program experience for girls. We currently have cross-functional teams engaged in researching the wants and needs of girls in four key customer segments – grades K-3; 4-5; 6-8 and 9-12. These teams are charged with developing coordinated strategies for attracting and retaining girls and volunteers for each segment. We are excited about the insights that the segment teams have come up with based on their initial research. As an outgrowth of their findings, there will be many opportunities – like the Girl Summit held just before this meeting – to engage girls and volunteers in discussions about innovative program ideas and strategies for engaging and supporting the volunteers required to implement effectively. We truly believe that this customer-focused approach can help position Girl Scouts to be THE organization of choice for girls and look forward to sharing our progress with you. Our colleagues at GSUSA and Girl Scout councils around the country are also following our efforts with great interest because they see the potential to impact the Movement at a national level.

Of course, no Stewardship report would be complete without highlighting some of our amazing girls. One bright example is Mai Yer Xiong, a senior at Central High School in St. Paul.

Mai is a proud member of Girl Scouts Hmong Women's Circle. She recently shared with us that the courage and confidence she gained from her participation in Girl Scouts encouraged her to pursue her ambition to study law. Mai credits selling cookies for teaching her about what it takes to achieve a goal – motivation, determination and persistence. These are

important skills that will help her succeed in college and achieve her dream of becoming a lawyer. Mai also speaks positively about the opportunities that she's had through Girl Scouts to connect with inspiring role models. During the past year, she really enjoyed attending career dialog sessions hosted by two of River Valleys' 2009 Women of Distinction honorees. These women provided Mai with helpful advice and encouragement that removed any lingering doubts about her setting her sights on a legal career. Mai has been accepted to Wellesley College for the freshman class entering this fall, and we are confident that she is well prepared to take full advantage of that opportunity.

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Another great example is Amanda Tank-Johnson, who exhibited great courage and presence of mind in rescuing a young child this past summer. While at a neighborhood lake with her family, Amanda was wading in shallow water off the boat dock when she spotted a two-year-old boy wandering onto the boat launch. When he suddenly slipped into the deep water, and Amanda realized that there was no lifeguard nearby to assist, she quickly jumped in and pulled the boy to safety. Having heard the boy's cries, his mother came rushing over to the parking lot just as Amanda pulled him to shore. The mother – who didn't speak English well – couldn't fully express her gratitude for Amanda's selfless act, so she simply said "Thank you" and took the frightened child away.

As a Girl Scout, Amanda had developed a desire to help others and confidence in her ability to deal with challenging situations. Her troop leader said "Amanda is always eager and willing to help people around her. I am not surprised that she just jumped in and helped the little boy." Girl

Scouts of the USA recently recognized Amanda's quick-thinking and heroic act by awarding her the Bronze Cross. This award is given to Girl Scouts who save, or attempt to save, a human life with risk to the candidate's own life. River Valleys is very proud of Amanda and we are delighted to have her here with us today to accept the award in person.

Amanda, will you please come forward and accept our congratulations. Thank you, Amanda. Please join me in acknowledging Amanda's accomplishment with a round of applause.

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In closing, it is important to note that we are approaching the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Girl Scouting that will occur in 2012. On a Movement-wide level, we hope to use this milestone event to achieve four key goals:

- Raise awareness and visibility around our mission. Effectively communicate the impact that Girl Scouts has had on women's leadership over time and the work that we are doing to prepare contemporary girls to meet the leadership challenges of the 21st century.
- Reconnect with Girl Scout alumnae. Leverage our greatest untapped resource (estimated at 50,000,000 women) to create an alumnae network that expands and enriches the opportunities we can provide to girls.
- Grow and diversify our membership. Increase participation among girls and volunteers from high-growth and under-served populations to keep pace with demographic trends.

- Raise a significant amount of money. Implement a transformative 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary fundraising campaign that will generate the funding required to support growth.

There are a number of exciting initiatives already underway at the national level to lay the groundwork for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year. GSUSA plans to share more information about this work with Board Chairs and CEOs at the National Corporate Leadership Meeting that will be held in late February. We anticipate River Valleys will be kicking off our local planning efforts sometime this Spring, and we will be looking to engage girls and volunteers. Information about how to get involved will be shared on our website, in our publications and through regular service unit meetings in the coming months.

I would also like to remind you about our second annual Women of Distinction luncheon that will be held on Thursday, April 8 at the Depot in downtown Minneapolis. We will be recognizing seven inspiring women who embody the leadership qualities that we try to develop in girls. Please visit the council website to reserve your tickets today!

Thanks to all of you for attending today's meeting and for your commitment to the Girl Scout mission. I appreciate this opportunity to share information with you about the state of the council and the exciting things we are working on to better position River Valleys as the organization of choice for girls and an unparalleled resource for parents who want to prepare their daughters to face the leadership challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Madame Chair, that concludes my report.