Good afternoon. It is simply wonderful that so many of you took time to be with us today. My name is Emmett Carson and I have the best job in the world serving as CEO of Silicon Valley Community Foundation. Let me add my personal thanks to all the members of the panel. They were wonderful! Engaging all of our residents in the common problems that we face, those with wealth, those in need and all of those in between, those with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, those who are young and those who remember what it was like to be young, those with different sexual orientations, and those who are citizens and those who with every fiber of their being would like to be citizens, is the core work -- the most important work -- of the community foundation.

Today, Silicon Valley has an unprecedented opportunity to shape philanthropic giving in the 21st century. As the center of philanthropy, the community foundation is committed to meeting and exceeding all of the philanthropic expectations of our nearly 1,600 family and corporate donor funds. After all, we wouldn’t have the most incredible board volunteers directing and overseeing our work and the very best staff team in philanthropy if we didn’t absolutely love the work that we do, and the impact that all of you make working with us and through us.

Last year we celebrated our fifth year anniversary since the historic merger of Peninsula Community Foundation and Community Foundation Silicon Valley. In addition to having a great anniversary celebration, we also took the time to reflect on where we had been, where we were, and, most importantly, where we are going. As CEO, I was particularly struck by two amazing and seemingly contradictory statistics.

Today, because of the generosity of our donors, Silicon Valley Community Foundation is the largest single funder of nonprofit organizations in the 9 county Bay Area. Our donors are passionate about giving and deeply involved in making our entire region a better place for all.

The second statistic is that Silicon Valley Community Foundation is ranked as the 13th largest international funder in the U.S. Last year we processed grants to 25 countries. It is clear that our family and corporate donors are global citizens who care both about where they live and the world in which we all live.

I was fascinated with trying to understand how the community foundation was both becoming more deeply engaged in our local community while at the same time becoming a global philanthropic leader. The answer, as it turned out, wasn’t all that complicated. Silicon Valley families and companies increasingly see themselves as being glocal – local and global. And, because the community foundation exists to serve our local donors, our local and global grantmaking mirrors the duality of their philanthropic interests and passions.

This new realization led the community foundation’s board to approve a new mission statement. It states: Silicon Valley Community Foundation is a comprehensive center of philanthropy. Through visionary leadership, strategic grantmaking and world-class experiences, we partner with donors to strengthen the common good locally and throughout the world.

We also introduced a new logo which we believe better reflects our continuous efforts to widen the circle and deepen the engagement.

In the time I have remaining, I want to reveal to you the community foundation’s secret formula for widening the circle and deepening the engagement which is just another way of saying community building or civic engagement.

Community building consists of three simple ingredients: learn, share and act. First, learn as much as you possibly can about an issue. Second, widely share and discuss what you have learned with as many people as you can. And third, once you have shared and discussed what you have learned, act with courage and conviction. Let me share a few concrete examples with you:
Five years ago, at this very regional meeting, we identified that our poorest communities were being preyed upon by payday lenders who charged over 400 percent interest. We began documenting this practice and its harmful impact on families. We shared that information broadly with donors, community groups, media outlets and businesses. The overwhelming consensus was that this practice is unacceptable and we began to act. Today, because of our collective work with many partners, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and the cities of San Jose, East Palo Alto, Los Altos and Pacifica have all enacted ordinances to restrict payday lending. In particular, San Jose’s ordinance has been widely praised as a new national model. At the state level, we successfully lobbied to prevent payday lenders from increasing loan amounts. We also have supported alternatives to payday lending including a new state law that was just signed that allows state chartered credit unions to accept non-members.

The world watched in horror as the Japanese earthquake and tsunami devastated coastal Japan. At home, our horror turned to fear as we realized that our own coast was vulnerable to experiencing the exact same catastrophe. We responded using our secret formula. We started by commissioning a special report, San Mateo County Coastside Tsunami-Preparedness Assessment Report, to learn and document our community’s level of readiness. Unfortunately, we found that we are not fully prepared. Since releasing the report, we have been meeting with community leaders, sharing and discussing the report. We are now acting with Coastside nonprofit groups, businesses and government leaders to fill the gaps so that when disaster strikes, our community will be prepared.

Recently, a school board member of one of the 54 separate school districts in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties blogged that I have a strange obsession about education. I want to confess to all of you that I am obsessed with wanting every child to have an opportunity to excel at a public school. Public schools made the difference in my life, my daughter’s life and it is the mechanism through which society ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity. What I don’t understand is why everyone isn’t obsessed – especially a school board member – with making improved educational outcomes for our children a priority.

Let me remind you of just three of the many things we have learned about public education in our region:

- In San Mateo County more than half, 51.8 percent, of all 12th graders did not meet UC/CSU requirements, including 39 percent of all white students.
- In Santa Clara County, more than half, 51.1 percent, of all 12th graders did not meet UC/CSU requirements, including 42 percent of all white students.
- Eighth grade students with similar standardized test results and course grades in math are being placed in different levels of math when they enter high school based on race and income.

We have a crisis in our educational system that is beyond just the challenges facing kids of color that is a collective community failure. We need more from parents, more from teachers, more from businesses and more from each and every one of us to ensure that our kids can compete in a global 21st century economy. Based on what we have learned and shared, we have started to act.

- Through our grantmaking, 6,000 students have received access to math tutoring and 550 teachers have received additional training in how to make math fun and engaging.
- Fifteen school districts have started to develop objective criteria for ensuring that students of equal promise have equal opportunity.
- The upcoming change to common core standards represents an incredible opportunity to significantly improve our public education system. Just two weeks ago, the community foundation convened a meeting of 39 of the 54 school districts to begin the process of learning and sharing so that we can act.

Yes, I am obsessed – and I hope that all of us remain obsessed until we can say that every child is well served by our public education system.
There are so many other efforts that I wish I had sufficient time to talk about.

- Our merger with the Entrepreneurs’ Foundation means that we now partner with 150 corporations in their grantmaking and corporate social responsibility efforts to make our region and world better places.

- Our donors are deepening the engagement with each other as they learn, share and act through donor circles for the Arts, Environment and, reflecting global interests, Africa.

- We again partnered with San Mateo County to provide $1 million in food and shelter safety-net grants to our region’s neediest families.

- As described in our current issue of ONE Magazine, we have continued to develop award winning websites and smartphone apps to ensure immigrants at home and across the nation are treated fairly and have access to equal opportunity.

- We are proud of our partnership with CalTrain to spread the joy of giving through the return of the Holiday Train. We look forward to seeing you with your families on December 1 and 2 as we reignite the spirit of giving throughout our region.

- Last year we awarded 283 scholarships totaling over $680,000 and this year we are likely to do even more. Consistent with the California Dream Act that was signed into law last year, several of our scholarship funds have revised their criteria to provide scholarships to undocumented immigrants. I want to read an excerpt from an application letter from one of the eventual scholarship awardees.

  ...I have often felt that all doors were closed to me. My immigration and economic status provide constant challenges, and the fact that my parents would prefer that I get married and start a family rather than pursue my education only adds to the stress. I attended Foothill Community College after high school graduation. I was not satisfied with my grades, but it was really hard to get straight A’s when I had to work and my living room served as living, sleep and homework space. I worked hard for 3 years to improve my English, … to be able to transfer … to attend a competitive university.

  While still at community college and awaiting my entrance at UC Santa Cruz, I continued to work three part time jobs…. I worked weekends cleaning houses, have a paid internship at school, and work hard to get the grades that I expect of myself…. 

  My education was never an expectation of my family. My childhood vanished into cooking and taking care of my younger siblings since my parents worked from sunrise to sunset to be able to give us food and shelter. I want to continue my education to have a better life and to support my family and community. The Odette Moren scholarship will assist me to pursue my passion for learning and my dream to become the first one in my family to get a higher education degree.”

While you will hear us talk a lot about systemic change, we have not forgotten the importance of making a difference, one life at a time.

In closing, I want to encourage all of you here to join us on Facebook and to sign-up for our e-newsletters. I also have started to tweet for those of you who prefer to digest information in smaller chunks. All of these media tools are designed to do one thing – help us build and connect with each other for the purpose of learning, sharing and acting together.

In any other community, we might be content to rest on our laurels. However, we live in Silicon Valley. We know the value of creative destruction in order to make things better. Our community is fortunate to be experiencing another wealth boom and we have an enormous opportunity to engage and harness this wealth for the benefit of our community and the world. Please know that we understand what a privilege it is to work with all of you and that we will do all that we can to continually widen our circle and deepen our engagement. We continue to need your ideas and your financial support to make both the big things and the small things happen. Our community can only rely on all of us.

Again, our sincere thanks to you for coming and I look forward to seeing all of you at the reception. Thank you!