These dinners honoring retirees have a personal poignancy for me, because I am finding myself saying farewell to the last vestiges of faculty and staff who were here when I was a student. So I’m glad I had the chance to shake each one of your hands, and congratulate and thank you in person as you came forward to accept these gifts.

As President, I often get the credit for the progress Georgia Tech is making toward our goal of defining the technological university of the 21st century. But you are the ones who have really done the work. Day-in and day-out through the years, you have been building Georgia Tech, brick by brick, piece by piece. You have taken care of this place and made its facilities and its programs better and better through your years of service. You have given so much to Georgia Tech, and we are going to miss you all.

Even though you are retiring, all of us know that old age is always 15 years older than whatever age we happen to be. Or, as Jack Benny put it, “Age is mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.”

Throughout your working career here, and for some of you that’s been a lot of years, you have devoted your time and attention and energy to helping Georgia Tech become the best we can be. Now it is time to take some time for yourselves… to shine in ways that simply weren’t possible until you could quit your day job… to do the things you’ve always wanted to do… to follow where other interests might take you… to give of your time and talents to other worthy causes.

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates took time in his old age to learn to dance and play musical instruments. The Roman philosopher Cato set out to learn Greek when he was 80. When a friend asked him why he was beginning so large an undertaking at such an advanced age, he replied that it was the youngest age he had left.

So relax, take it easy. But also be creative, explore, try something new, do the things you’ve always dreamed of doing, tackle retirement with the same enthusiasm and spirit you have shown here at Tech. Remember, you are the hero of your own life story.

As retirees, you will have lots of company out there. Of all the people who have made it to the age of 65 in the entire history of the world, more than half are alive today. We no longer work until we drop in the traces like our ancestors did. An increasing life expectancy has given us the gift of retirement, and you are part of the first full generation of American retirees.

I’m not quite there yet myself. But from everything I’ve heard, retirement has as many fascinations and opportunities as youth. It has its own driving forces, its freedom from hard work, its special perspective on life, and its own brand of grace and graciousness. And the rest of us will be watching and learning from your experience with it, because we are going to be following in your footsteps.
So as you leave this campus and move on to the next stage of your lives, go with our words of heart-felt appreciation ringing in your ears. This Institute is a better place today because you gave us a considerable part of your life and your talents to help carry the work forward. We are grateful for the many ways you have helped make Georgia Tech a special place. We wish all of you the very best.