

626-2111 fax

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Division of Epidemiology  
School of Public Health

Suite 300  
1300 South Second Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55454-1015  
612-624-1818  
Fax: 612-624-0315

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Mark G. Yudof  
President  
Morrill Hall



*Frank Lerner*

Dear Colleague:

You will enjoy Finland and the Finns.

The University has an on-going collaboration with Finnish health leaders dating back to 1956. This began with the Seven Countries Study, described in the attached booklet, "On the Trail of Heart Attacks." Martti Karvonen, who is still alive and who "knows everyone in Finland," is a physiologist who was formerly Surgeon General under President Kekkonen. He told Ancel Keys of Minnesota about his early post-war observations that the Finns had many heart attack cases along with an atrocious eating pattern. The contrast with Keys's experience in Mediterranean countries and Japan led us in Minnesota into the thirty-five year adventure of that study, still coordinated from here. A taste of the adventure is enclosed, and I refer you particularly to the flavor of the chapter on Finland.

The sequel to our findings about their unique risk of heart attack eventually permeated the public of eastern Finland or North Karelia. Their leaders, at first simply courteous and curious, then became angry and aroused to do something about their risk. The North Karelia Project grew out of this awareness and was a pioneering, genuinely community-wide effort in prevention and public health. I sat on the WHO advisory group to its organization in 1971, and returned for its twenty-fifth anniversary in Kuopio only last November. The Minnesota Heart Health Program, a ten-year project of our School of Public Health, was a direct outgrowth of this Finnish experience.

If you should visit the University of Kuopio you might be aware of the fact that I signed an informal agreement between our Universities at the occasion of receiving an honorary degree there in 1982. This was, I

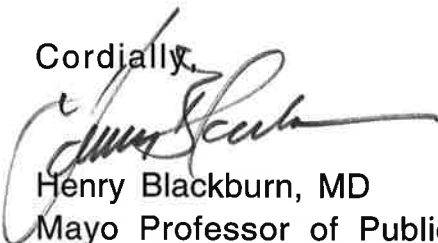
believe, parallel to a sister-city status with Minneapolis, and there may be something about that in the files from Peter Magrath's time. Osmo Heinonen was then Rector at Kuopio University and is still active on the faculty. Their provincial system branches are specialized and Kuopio University includes the medical and social sciences. Kalevi Pyörälä, internist and epidemiologist, still a major figure in Finnish medicine, was the colleague who arranged this Minnesota connection, and we had a number of post-doctoral fellows here from Kuopio. Aulikki Nissinen is his successor in our continued collaborations.

The director of the innovative North Karelia Project, Pekka Puska, now heads, as well, the Department of Epidemiology and Health Promotion at the National Public Health Institute in Helsinki. He recently completed a term in the Finnish Parliament and is a most knowledgeable colleague and friend of Minnesota. Among many other things, he is responsible for a remarkable shift from dairy farming to berry farming in east Finland, and for the development of a cholesterol-lowering spread that was licensed for U.S. use just last week. He also directs a successful international seminar in community health promotion that includes students from eastern and African and Latin-American countries (there are advantages to being small and "neutral" — and innovative!).

I enclose addresses of these people in our "Minnesota Connection," and will be happy to alert them of your upcoming visit if you would like.

You might want to check my paragraph on the "Fit Finns," and not let them go overboard with sauna when you visit. A gradual build-up in the temperatures you're exposed to, and always a slow cool-down, can make it an elevating experience. I should avoid plunges into cold lakes afterward. But sauna participation is a near-religious practice, and is expected of the visitor, including spouses. Enjoy!

Cordially,



Henry Blackburn, MD  
Mayo Professor of Public Health (Emeritus)

encl. Seven Countries Study/North Karelia Project

*Frank: I sent you a copy of the Seven Countries  
book last year. Enjoy Scandinavia!  
Henry Blackburn*

## The Minnesota-Finland Connection

Pekka Puska MD  
Director, Epidemiology and Health Promotion  
National Public Health Institute  
Mannerheimintie 166  
00300 Helsinki/Finland  
358 9 474 336

Martti Karvonen MD  
Surgeon General (Emeritus)  
Osuuskunnantie 58  
00660 Helsinki 66  
358 9 72 49 849

Kalevi Pyörälä MD  
Professor Emeritus  
University of Kuopio  
70211 Kuopio  
358 17 36 42 804

Aulikki Nissinen MD  
Professor  
University of Kuopio  
70211 Kuopio  
358 17 162 912

Osmo Heinonen MD  
Rector (Emeritus)  
University of Kuopio  
70211 Kuopio  
358 17 163 080

Petter Paronen MD  
Current or in-coming ? Rector  
University of Kuopio  
70211 Kuopio  
358 17 162 211