

January/February 2025 Optimist International Foundation President's Newsletter



Beyond Words: Where Every Child's Voice Matters



A Monthly Resource for Club and District Foundation Representatives



OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

Mission Statement

Seeking, receiving and managing funds and real personal property for the benefit of Optimist International and its Member Clubs in its charitable, literary and educational activities.

Vision Statement

We envision a Foundation that can provide significant funding for Optimist International's youth and service programs and is proudly supported by individual Optimists, their Clubs, and the community at large.

Tagline

Helping Optimists Help Kids!

Tax and Charitable Status

The Optimist International Foundation is a 501(c)(3) corporation within the meaning of the Internal Revenue Code of the United States. Within 501(c)(3), the Foundation is a 509(a)(3) public charity.

Optimist International Convention

St. Louis, Missouri
St. Louis Union Station Hotel
June 29 -July 3, 2025

FOMO Newsletter

Ben DeRemer	Editor in chief
Jim Kondrasuk	Contributing writer
Fatima Plater	Contributing writer
Deb Merritt	Contributing writer

REMEMBER TO VOTE



Sandy Cyphers



Joanne Ganske

Image: Optimist International Foundation Board Candidates from page 7.

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Dear Friends,

As we embark on this new year, I continue to be inspired by the unwavering dedication and generosity of our Optimist community. Your commitment to our mission ensures that every child's voice is heard, valued, and empowered.

Board of Directors Election

The annual election is underway from **February 1 through February 28, 2025**. This is a pivotal opportunity to shape the future of our Foundation, and we are fortunate to have two exceptional and well-qualified candidates, **Sandy Cyphers** and **Joanne Ganske**, running for the position. If you are eligible, I encourage you to cast your vote and make your voice heard. More details about the candidates and voting process can be found on our website and on **Pages 7-10** of this newsletter.

Club Grant Program Deadline

A reminder to all Clubs that the **Club Grant Program** application deadline is **March 21, 2025**. This program provides matching grants of **\$250 to \$1,000** to support new and innovative community service projects. I encourage Clubs to take advantage of this opportunity to expand their impact and bring their ideas to life.

Spotlight on *The Unbreakable Boy*

Many of you may remember our **2022 Optimist International Convention** keynote speaker, **Scott LeRette**, who shared the incredible journey of his son, **Austin ("Auz-Man")**, who has **autism and osteogenesis imperfecta (OI)**—a condition that causes fragile bones. Their story, chronicled in Scott's book *The Unbreakable Boy*, is a powerful testament to resilience, love, and the strength of Optimism. I'm excited to share that their inspiring journey has been adapted into a feature film, premiering in theaters this month. I encourage you to experience this uplifting story and share its message of hope within your communities.

Looking Ahead

Thank you for your continued support and dedication. Together, we are making a lasting difference in the lives of young people, fostering a brighter and more Optimistic future for all.

Yours in Optimism,

Ben DeRemer
2024-2025 President
Optimist International Foundation

President's Team Messages



What were some of the board's strategies to recover from financial challenges during your tenure?

2019-2023 Past OI President Director-at-Large · Jim Kondrasuk

As a past director of the OIF I would like to share a few thoughts on the actions and the direction the OIF Board had taken during my tenure on the OIF Board, and still does, in regard to our invested funds. First of all, the Board does function as a fiduciary - what that means is that we are legally obligated and mandated to keep the best interests of you as members and contributors as our # 1 focus. Included in the fiduciary duties of the Board is to seek appropriate ways to manage and invest the funds entrusted to the OIF. Furthermore the Board has to look at the return on the funds in two ways: first to maintain the value of the funds as a permanent endowment, meaning our goal is not to dip into the base principal value of the core fund; and second to look for a return that will enable the OIF to continue to disburse funds that have been authorized by the Board. That sound simple, but it is not.

The OIF funds are invested with a professional investment management firm, they work closely with the Board, and our Executive Director Craig. The Board sets the overall investment strategy/policy in terms of where the funds are invested, and what percentage of our funds can be invested in any one category of assets: Corporate Bonds, US Govt Investments, Common Stocks (large corporation, medium, and small) and anything else that may arise. The Board gets monthly reports from the investment firm, and the Board reviews the results. Two key factors: what was the return, and is the overall portfolio in the percentage of assets in a category within the Board set percentage of assets in any asset category. Sounds "easy" thus far, but the items we cannot control but have to react to include major market moves, government policy, international developments and events, a Pandemic and the like. But the good news is that between our Investment Policy, Craig's vigilance in watching, and a great relationship with our investment advisor, your Board has maintained a sound investment portfolio, we have not dipped into the core investments, we have had good and bad years but we have grown the asset base of the OIF.

What were the biggest similarities and differences in how the club grant committee and the childhood health and wellness committee evaluate applications?

2025-2026 OIF President · Fatima Plater

All grants whether Club Grants or Childhood Health and Wellness Grants are evaluated based on the information provided by the club on the respective applications. Directions for each grant are provided online. A video of the 2025 Club Grant webinar will be available online at oifoundation.org and the recording along with slides will be sent to District Optimist International Foundation Representatives. After viewing the 2025 Grant webinar video, forward further questions to:

Craig Boring, Executive Director of the Optimist International Foundation

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bus: (314) 371-6000 ex 203

toll free: (1800) 500-8130.



Foundation Event Calendar



Board of Directors Election: 2025–2029

Dime-a-Day donors from last year and Clubs that gave a dollar a day at the 365 Club level can vote in February through their current Club Foundation Representative to elect a board member who will serve on the OIF Board of Directors from 2025–2029.



OI Magazine - Foundation Edition

The upcoming OI Magazine – Foundation Edition highlights the impact of both foundations and the benefits of giving. This special issue showcases how donations support scholarships, grants, and youth programs, creating a lasting legacy of optimism.



OI Board of Directors Meeting

The upcoming Optimist International Board Meeting includes the Presidents of both foundations and the JOI President as non-voting members. Their participation brings insights and fosters stronger relationships with Optimist International and its board.



Club Grant Application Deadline

The Club Grant Program applications are due March 21. Don't miss this opportunity to secure funding for impactful projects that support programs within your community. Submit your application today to make a difference!



The JOIful Weekend of Giving

The JOIful Weekend of Giving is a dedicated fundraising event to empower youth leaders by supporting the JOI Leadership Summit, funding opportunities for growth, education, and service. Together, we invest in the future of tomorrow's leaders today.



Second Quarter Foundation Talking Points

As we move through the second quarter, there are three key areas for **District Foundation Representatives (DFRs)** and **Club Foundation Representatives (CFRs)** to focus on. These talking points will help guide conversations with Clubs and Members, ensuring they stay engaged and informed about the Foundation's work.

1. Foundation Grant Programs – Funding for Your Club's Projects

- The **Club Grant Program** and **Childhood Health & Wellness Grants** provide financial resources for Clubs to expand their impact and fund local initiatives. These grants help bring Optimist projects to life, supporting efforts that directly benefit youth and communities.
- Encourage Clubs to review the grant application process and consider applying. Many Clubs may not realize these funds are available, and we want to ensure that every Club has the opportunity to receive support.

2. Board of Directors Election – Get Involved, Get Informed, and Vote

- The election for the **Foundation's Board of Directors** is happening soon! This is a critical opportunity for Members to **help shape the future of the Foundation** and ensure strong leadership moving forward.
- **Every vote matters.** Encourage Clubs and Members to learn about the candidates, ask questions, and most importantly—**cast their vote when the time comes.**

3. Keep the Dime-a-Day Momentum Going

- The first quarter saw strong participation in the **Dime-a-Day Program**, but there's still room to grow. **For just \$36.50 a year—10 cents a day—Members can help support scholarships, youth programs, and Foundation initiatives.**
- If your Club is already participating, challenge Members to **invite others to join** or set a new Club-wide goal. A small contribution from many people adds up to a **huge impact!**

By focusing on these key areas, **DFRs and CFRs** can help drive Club engagement, increase participation in grant opportunities, and encourage Members to take part in the upcoming Board of Directors election.

Let's keep the momentum going for the rest of the year!

Optimist International Foundation Elections

Submitted by **Deb Merritt** · 2022-2023 Optimist International Foundation President



Attention all Donors – Time is running out – Cast your vote by February 28.

We currently have two candidates who are running for the Optimist International Foundation's Board of Directors - Sandy Cyphers and Joanne Ganske. The individual who is elected will not only serve on the Board for four years beginning in October of 2025, they will also serve as President of the Foundation during the 2028-2029 Optimist year.

The Board's role is to not only raise funds for the Foundation but to be good stewards of those funds to ensure sufficient monies are available to support all of the programs of Optimist International. Board Members work directly with OIF staff to provide the necessary services to assist our donors and our District & Club Foundation Representatives. They also seek ways in which to foster a greater awareness about the Foundation to Optimist International's Clubs and Members.

As a past Board Member and President of the Foundation, I have always been impressed by the fact that our donors control the Foundation's leadership through this election process. We are one of very few foundations that do this. As a result, this is an excellent time for you to make your voices heard and to choose a qualified candidate to help shape the future direction of the Foundation.

Our Board's leadership decisions impact scholarships, grants, and other programs that directly benefit not only our Optimist Clubs but the youth and communities they serve.

So who can vote you ask? All Dime-a-Day and higher individual Optimist Members/donors from the 2023-2024 Optimist year are eligible to vote as well as all Optimist Clubs that donated at the 365 Club level during the 2023-2024 Optimist year. Clubs cast their votes through their current Club Foundation Representative, but they must have a current Club Foundation Representative in order to vote. There are nearly 4,000 eligible votes in this election. Your participation is very important to ensure our leadership reflects donor priorities.

Several weeks ago on January 28th, I had the opportunity to moderate a Candidate's Forum wherein both candidates had an opportunity to talk about their qualifications and answer questions pertaining to what their focus and goals for the Foundation would be if they were elected. I would encourage you to watch the recording of the Candidate's Forum which is available on the Foundation's website. In addition, both candidates produced YouTube videos discussing their campaigns – both of which are also available on the website. After reviewing the videos and reading the statements from both candidates contained in this newsletter, please cast your (or your Club's) vote by going to the homepage of the Foundation website (www.oifoundation.org) and clicking the Vote Now button. You should have your Club and Member numbers available when you are prepared to vote.

I cannot impress upon you how important this election is. This is not a popularity contest. Please be an informed voter and choose the candidate who you feel would best represent the interests of you, your Club, Optimist International, and the Foundation.



Sandy Cyphers

2025-2029 Optimist International Foundation Board Member Candidate

Hello, my fellow Optimists! I am Sandy Cyphers, a “thirty-one years” optimist from the North Carolina East Optimist District and have been asked to run as a candidate for the upcoming election for the Board of Directors of the Optimist International Foundation. I am a member of the Winter Park Optimist Club, the Wilmington Optimist Club and the Childhood Cancer Optimist Club in South Carolina along with being a Friend of Optimist to the Cape Fear Optimist Club.

I am humble and honored to have been asked to run for this important position within Optimist International. For over 31 years, I have been afforded the opportunity to grow as a leader through my affiliation with the optimist organization. With my involvement I was recognized as a Distinguished Club President, Distinguished Governor for the N.C. East District and very honored to be recognized as the #1 Optimist International Vice President. During my tenure I have served as chairman in every position within my district, the exception of the Junior Golf. I have also had the honor of serving on the Optimist International Board of Directors, numerous Optimist International Committees such as Credentials, Convention, Governance, J.O.I. (Chairman twice) and committee member. I have been selected to do training in respective areas within our organization. I was recognized as a Builder of Excellence and have recruited over 55 new members. Through my years of serving and the knowledge I have acquired with our organization I will work to assist in the Board’s process of good decision-making.

I retired with a 27-year career as Assistant Collector of Revenue for New Hanover County in Wilmington, NC is located. My responsibilities were the supervision of 15 individuals within the collection department, responsible for collection of taxes for all towns within New Hanover County. Working with the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Department, Wilmington Police Department and the Kure, Carolina and Wrightsville Beach Police Departments. Preparing budgets, goal setting with employees, strategic

Sandy Cyphers Statement Continued

planning, making monthly reports to the Tax Administrator, the City and Town Councils, County Commissioners and the media. I had to maintain a strong leadership role, professionalism, and a sense of humor.

I have been committed to the Optimist International Foundation since I began my Optimist membership in 1993 and have been acknowledged as a William H. Harrison Society member, Christian D. Larson, President's Club. I have served as the District Foundation Representative where I was recognized as a Distinguished "DFR".

For several years it has been my honor to serve on and as the chairman of the Optimist International Women's Philanthropy Council. Along with those serving on this council we continue to make a difference within the Optimist International Foundation.

The Foundation is very important to our Optimist Organization, and I believe in its mission. It is the Lifeline, to all our Essay, Oratorical and World Oratorical Contests.

It is my belief that each Optimist Member should support the foundation as a member through at least the "Dime-a- Day level. I am a true believer in our foundation and what it does to make a difference in the lives of children through scholarships and thru the many grants that are presented each year to clubs for projects that "MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AND CHILDREN IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITIES."

If I am honored to be elected as a member of the Optimist International Foundation Board of Directors, I feel I would be an asset in that I would work diligently, share my knowledge having been in the position of finances, budgeting, appropriations, accounting and working with people harmoniously to share how important the foundation is to our organization and how important it is to continue making a difference in the lives of our young people. That donating does make a difference in their and other optimist member's respective communities.

Thanking you for your consideration and vote for the Optimist International Foundation Board of Directors.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandy Cyphers





Joanne Ganske

2025-2029 Optimist International Foundation Board Member Candidate

Joanne Ganske has been a charter member of the Cross Plains Optimist club since 1992. Was a distinguished President of that club in 1996. As Lt Governor of the SWIS District in 1997, I built my first new Optimist club in Mazomanie - WI Heights. In 2003 as SWIS District Governor I also joined that club because they needed a President and that club was too valuable for the community to fold and is still doing wonderful projects for their Youth today.

I was privileged to serve on 3 Optimist International Conventions as OI Convention Chairperson for Albuquerque, Ottawa and Louisville! (You may have remembered seeing me on stage at those Conventions).

I have been a proud Optimist member donating to the OI FOUNDATION for many years.

I am a Christian D. Larson member and have a William H Harrison membership!! Donating to the OI Foundation is valuable to the success of our organization and I hope to help the foundation grow in the future to serve more of our Youth.

My prior personal working life (before retirement) was as an Independent Personal Lines Insurance agent.

I ask for your vote to assist the OI Foundation in any way possible.

Thank you for your support and consideration.

Yours in Optimism,

Joanne Ganske

SWIS District

Past Great Plains Region Vice President 2009-2010

HDO Governor 2003-2004

Monthly District Rankings, Achievements, & Shout Outs

As we begin the new year, I want to recognize our District Foundation Representatives, Club Foundation Representatives, and District Governors. Your efforts in growing membership, securing donations, and supporting Optimist programs make a real impact. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to strengthening the Foundation's mission.

Top Districts in Dime-a-Day Membership

District	Total Memberships
Michigan	103
GATEway	72
West Missouri	67
Kansas	66
Louisiana	63



Membership Percentage Leaders:

Louisiana (16.49%), New York - New England (11.20%), and Kansas (8.23%) lead the way in member participation.

Biggest Year-Over-Year Growth:

AMS&NW surged with a +117.86% increase, with South Florida (+100%) and New York - New England (+72.15%) close behind.

Unrestricted Donations by Dollar-Per-Member

District	Dollar-Per Member	District Foundation Representative
North Carolina West	\$117.88	Bill Teague
Ohio	\$15.59	Bill Stone
Capital - Virginia	\$10.38	Barbara Grizzard
AMS&NW	\$9.37	Susan Robbenolt
New Mexico - West Texas	\$8.02	Jim Crowl

President's Club Recognition

Top New Members:

Indiana North added 3 new members.

North Carolina West, Michigan, and Ohio, welcomed 2 new members each.

Renewals Leaders:

Michigan and Alabama - Mississippi each celebrated 9 renewals.

Ohio, West Missouri, and Ohio followed with 6 renewals.

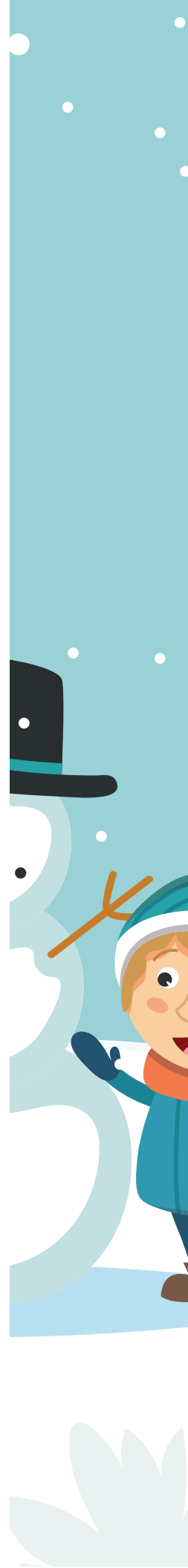
Women's Philanthropy Council Growth

Membership Percentage Leaders:

North Florida (3.61%), AMS&NW (1.65%), and Arizona (1.57%) continue to grow their Women's Philanthropy Council memberships.

Year-over-Year Growth Leaders:

AMS&NW shines with a whopping +800%, followed by Pacific Northwest (+500%), and Kansas (+150%).





OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL
FOUNDATION

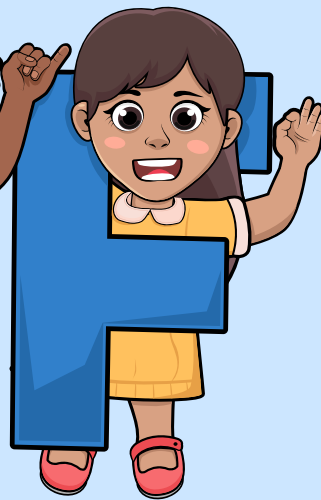
SAVE THE DATE!

2025 OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL 107TH CONVENTION

June 29 - July 3, 2025 • St. Louis, MO • St. Louis Union Station Hotel

365 CLUB

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