



Kansas District Newsletter

July 2026

Governor:

Randy Bailes, RandyB16@cox.net

Immediate Past Governor:

Judy Morris, JudyTheOptimist@gmail.com

Governor-Elect:

Jacob Swisher, jaswisher@gmail.com

Treasurer:

Joe Shank, shank9538@gmail.com

Secretary:

Mary Griffin, kumoogie@aol.com

Lt. Governors

Zone 1: Judy Leary, Learysr@att.net

Zone 2: Rod Obermeier, obermeirrd@cox.net

Zone 3: Bill Wisdom, billwisdom17@gmail.com

Zone 4: Jim Morris,
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District Team

Health and Wellness: Marlene Natoli,
marnatoli@att.net

Conf/Conv & Protocol: Suzi Obermeier,
suziobermeier@gmail.com

Foundation Rep: Dale Fox,
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Finance Committee Chair: Charles Galligher,
cgalligher@cox.net

Member: Ruth Nelson,
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Member: Cecil Cunday, cbcundayii@aol.com

International Convention Ambassador: Dave
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KANSAS DISTRICT OPTIMISTS 4TH QUARTER DISTRICT CONVENTION AUGUST 21-23, 2026 TOPEKA, KANSAS

Meeting Place:

**Hilton Garden Inn
1351 SW Arvon Place
Topeka, KS**

***Friday Evening:* Picnic and Ruth Nelson Cancer
Walk, Sunrise Optimist Club Event Center**

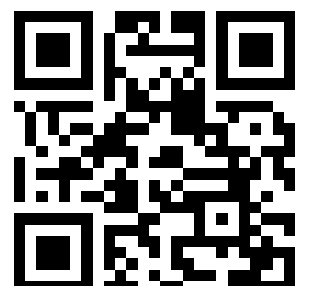
***Saturday:* Meeting, speakers, training and lunch**

***Saturday evening:* Banquet**

***Sunday:* Breakfast and Memorial Service**



A registration form is attached to this newsletter or register online at ksoptimist.org or by using this QR code. Registration is due by August 12. An agenda for the weekend is also attached.





MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR RANDY BAILES

KANSAS OPTIMISTS: FINISH STRONG, GROW STRONGER

As we enter the fourth quarter of our Optimist year, I find myself feeling both grateful and encouraged. Grateful for the many Kansas Optimists who have stepped up, shown up, and given so much of themselves this year. Encouraged because I have seen firsthand the difference our clubs are making in communities across our District. Whether it has been a youth project, a scholarship program, a club fundraiser, or simply one Optimist encouraging another, you continue to show what it means to live the Optimist Creed—not only in words, but in action.

For me, the fourth quarter is a time to reflect on where we have been and focus on how we want to finish. It is more than the final stretch of the calendar; it is our chance to celebrate progress, strengthen our clubs, and leave the year better than we found it. Club growth remains one of our most important priorities because every new member brings more helping hands, fresh ideas, and opportunities to bring out the best in kids, our communities, and ourselves. This year, Optimist International—meaning each of us and every club—has the opportunity to accomplish something that has not been done in more than 20 years: finish the year at net zero. That means ending the year with the same number of members we had when we started.

I know that asking someone to join can sometimes feel uncomfortable, but I also know this: most of us became Optimists because someone invited us. Someone saw in us a willingness to serve and gave us the opportunity to belong to something meaningful. This quarter, I hope each of us will think about the people in our own lives who may be waiting for that same invitation—a parent, teacher, coach, business owner, former scholarship recipient, neighbor, friend, or family member who wants to make a difference but may not know where to begin.

MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR RANDY BAILES

There are many helpful membership tools available through Optimist International, and I encourage clubs to use them. But I believe the most powerful tool we have is still our own story. When we share why we became Optimists, what keeps us involved, and the moments that have touched our hearts, we help others understand that this organization is about more than meetings and projects. It is about purpose, friendship, service, and hope.

I also want us to remember that growth is not only about bringing in new members. It is about taking care of the members we already have. A phone call, a handwritten note, a personal invitation to come back to a meeting, or a simple “we miss you” can mean more than we realize. Newer members need to be given meaningful roles, longtime members need to know they are appreciated, and every member needs to feel that they are part of the club’s success.

As your District Governor, I am asking each Kansas club to take three personal and practical steps before the year ends: invite at least one new person to experience Optimism, reach out to at least one member we have not seen in a while, and encourage at least one person to consider a leadership role for the coming year. These are not complicated goals, but they are meaningful ones. If every club takes even these simple steps, our District will finish the year stronger and begin the next one with renewed energy.

Finishing strong also means helping our club officers, preparing smooth leadership transitions, and sharing the good stories that are happening in our communities. I have always believed that one of the best things about Optimists is our willingness to encourage one another. Let’s use these final months to lift each other up, complete the work before us, and set the next leaders up for success.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your District Governor and for the kindness, support, and encouragement so many of you have shared along the way. I am proud of the work being done by Kansas Optimists, and I am excited about what we can still accomplish together. The work we do matters. The children we serve matter. The communities we strengthen matter. Let’s close this year with purpose, gratitude, and a renewed commitment to keep growing clubs that welcome, serve, and inspire.

MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR RANDY BAILES

Meet me in Topeka! Our 66th Kansas District Convention will be held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Topeka, August 21-23, 2026. Gather for a picnic on Friday evening at the Sunrise Optimist Club Event Center. Enjoy a full day of fellowship with other Optimists, workshops, speakers, and the installation of our 2026-2027 District officers on Saturday. We will end our convention on Sunday morning with a breakfast and an inspirational devotional time and memorial service for those fellow Optimists we have lost this past year.

Let's finish strong—and grow stronger together.

Yours in Optimism

Randy Bailes, 2025-2026 Kansas District Governor

Friday Picnic: 6:00 p.m., Sunrise Optimist Club Event Center

Saturday Registration: 8:30 a.m., Hilton Garden Inn

Convention: 9:00 a.m.

Social Hour and Banquet: 5:30 p.m., Hilton Garden Inn

Sunday Morning Breakfast and Memorial Service: 8:00 a.m., Hilton Garden Inn

Full Agenda at the End of this Newsletter

OFFICER ELECT REPORT

Governor Randy would like to remind all clubs to report your officers for 2026-2027 to OI. Even if you have the same officers as last year, you need to complete the Officer Elect Report which can be found on your club's home page on the Optimist International website. It is necessary for OI and the district to have the names and contact information for your officers so they can receive important emails.



Donation Drive

Supporting Sleep in Heavenly Peace

at the 2026 Kansas District Optimist Convention

No Kid Sleeps on the Floor in Our District!

Join Kansas Optimists in helping children receive a safe, comfortable place to sleep. Every new twin-size bedding item helps Sleep in Heavenly Peace provide children ages 3–17 with a complete bed setup.

Bring New Twin-Size Bedding Items

- New twin sheet sets
- New twin comforters or bed-in-a-bag sets
- New pillows
- New blankets or quilts
- Kid-friendly patterns and colors are welcome

Please donate new items only. Twin-size bedding helps each child receive clean, comfortable essentials.

Drop-Off Information

When	August 21–23, 2026
Where	Hilton Garden Inn, 1351 Arvonla Pl, Topeka, KS
Drop Off	Convention Registration Desk during the Kansas District Optimist Convention
Questions	Governor Randy Bailes • 785-224-9006 • randyb16@cox.net

Why It Matters

Sleep in Heavenly Peace is a volunteer-driven nonprofit dedicated to building and delivering beds to children who need them. Your donation helps bring comfort, dignity, and a good night's sleep to Kansas children.

Optimists bring out the best in youth—help us make sure no kid sleeps on the floor!

Thank you for supporting Sleep in Heavenly Peace and the 2026 Kansas District Optimist Convention donation drive.

USA 250TH ANNIVERSARY QUILT RAFFLE

Past District Secretary-Treasurer Rita Barnard (2000-2001) has donated a 48" x 64" lap quilt to the District to be raffled in support of the International Optimist Foundation. The quilt features a **"USA-250th Anniversary"** theme and has been machine quilted with a red, white, and blue star motif. Photos of the front and back of the quilt are shown below.

Tickets will be sold for \$5.00 each or the bargain price of 5 for \$20.00. You can purchase tickets in advance or at the District Convention in Topeka, August 21-22. Winning ticket will be drawn during the Banquet Saturday night. You do not have to be present to win.

Tickets may be purchased in advance from your Zone Lt Governor, DFR – Dale Fox, Governor-Elect Jacob Swisher, or Governor Randy Bailes. Clubs may also collect names, phone numbers, and money for tickets, give the names and money to Dale at the convention, and he will add the tickets to the drawing.

Contact Information:

Zone 1 Lt Governor: Judy Leary, 913-302-6591, learysr@att.net

Zone 2 Lt Governor: Rod Obermeier, 785-554-5710. obermeierrd@cox.net

Zone 3 Lt Governor: Bill Wisdom, 785-410-6178, billwisdom17@gmail.com

Zone 4 Lt Governor: Jim Moris, 316-516-1186, jimmorris2007@yahoo.com

Governor-Elect: Jacob Swisher, 913-222-4380 jaswisher@gmail.com

Governor: Randy Bailes, 785-224-9006, randyb16@cox.net



MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR-ELECT JACOB SWISHER



JOIN THE OPTIMIST MOVEMENT

The 2026 Optimist International Convention was held June 28 through July 1 at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville, overlooking the beautiful Jacksonville waterfront. Four Kansas District Optimists made the trip to enjoy outstanding workshops, inspiring keynote speakers, leadership training, and fellowship with Optimists from across the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, and beyond. Jacksonville was a wonderful host city. The convention venue was within walking distance of local restaurants and shops, and many attendees took advantage of the opportunity to watch a Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp baseball game or simply enjoy the waterfront after a full day of convention activities.

The vision from President-Designate Michael Goldman is simple but powerful: Join the Optimist Movement by growing each of our clubs by one new member every month. Imagine the impact if every Optimist Club accepted that challenge. One new member each month would strengthen our clubs, expand our service projects, and spread Optimism throughout our communities. Every new member brings fresh ideas, new energy, and another volunteer dedicated to **Bringing Out the Best in Youth, Our Communities, and Ourselves.**

For the second consecutive year, Kansas City was well represented on the convention stage. Matt and Chrissy Stuart from Kansas City delivered a heartfelt keynote address, sharing their journey through cancer and how they maintained an optimistic spirit despite life's many challenges. Their message was a powerful reminder that optimism isn't about ignoring adversity—it's about choosing hope and perseverance when times are tough.

MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR-ELECT JACOB SWISHER

The General Sessions featured updates from Optimist International leadership, recognition of outstanding clubs and members, and plenty of opportunities to celebrate the impact Optimists make around the world. We also enjoyed a healthy dose of laughter from Joe Cocco, the "Dad Joke" guy, who reminded us that a smile and a laugh can go a long way.

Tuesday evening, the Kansas delegation gathered for a wonderful steak and seafood dinner overlooking the Jacksonville waterfront. It was a great opportunity to relax, share ideas, and enjoy the fellowship that makes Optimist International such a special organization.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of attending an international convention is returning home with new ideas. From membership growth and leadership development to service projects and fundraising strategies, every attendee came away with practical tools to help strengthen our Kansas clubs.

If you've never attended an Optimist International Convention, I encourage you to make plans now. You'll return energized, inspired, and ready to make an even greater difference in your club and community.

Mark your calendars for the 2027 Optimist International Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana, July 6–9, 2027. I hope to see even more Kansas Optimists there as we continue to grow our clubs and share the gift of Optimism.

Respectfully,

Jacob Swisher
Kansas District Governor-Elect 2026 - 2027
Cell: 913.222.4380

**Bringing out the
BEST in youth**



OPTIMIST WORLD ORATORICAL CONTEST

The 11th Annual Optimist World Oratorical Contest was held July 16-17 in St. Louis at Saint Louis University. The topic for this year's competition was **"The Moment I Realized I Belonged: My Definition of Community"**. Breahna Randall, who was sponsored by the Lawrence Breakfast Club, was the Kansas District representative and competed Thursday afternoon with other Middle America Region students. Breahna was the Middle America Regional Winner and participated in the finals on Friday. She received a \$5,000 college scholarship as a regional winner. **Breahna is shown on the screen in the top left-hand photo on the next page.**

After the final competitions, the following World Winners were announced. Their district and scholarship amounts are included.

1st Place: Jordyn Velitchkov, Iowa District, \$15,000

2nd Place: Avishai Deshpande, North Carolina East District, \$10,000

3rd Place: Eliza Philip, Pacific Central District, \$5,000

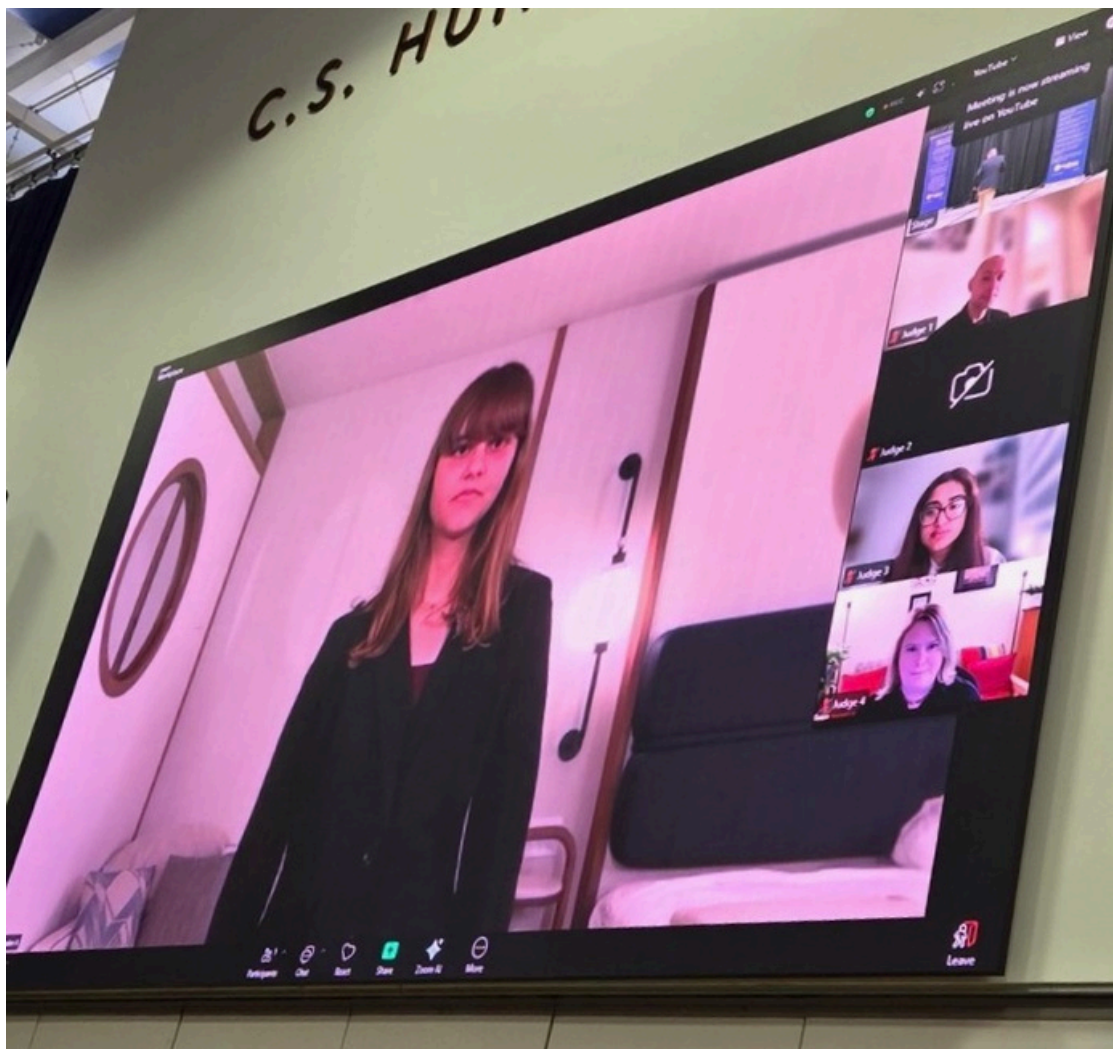
Diana Carlin-Pierron

District Oratorical Chair

Photos Courtesy of Diana Carlin and Dave Bruns



OPTIMIST WORLD ORATORICAL CONTEST



KANSAS DISTRICT JR GOLF QUALIFIER TOURNAMENT

On Friday, June 5th, fifty-nine Junior Golfers and six District volunteers gathered in Emporia for the Kansas District Qualifier of the Optimist International Junior Golf Championship. The Flint Hills Optimist Club of Emporia put up banners for this event. Seven of those junior golfers are playing in the Optimist International Junior Golf Championship in Miami, plus another Kansan who qualified because of his 5th place finish in the OIJGC last year.

Congratulations to our District first-place winners: Parker Koch, Emporia, 10-11 boys; Peyton Bundrant, Overland Park, 13-14 girls; Brody Buessing, Carbondale, 14-15 boys; Alina Lam, Wichita, 15-18 girls; and Patrick Mayo, Leawood. 16-18 boys division. Rowan Banning of Leawood had the 5th place finish at the OIJGC in 2025.

The OIJGC began July 15th and concludes July 30th, 2026. There will be nearly 700 junior golfers from around the world participating. The Kansas District provides financial help with the International Tournament as well as sponsors four division winners.

Many thanks to Governor Randy Bailes, Governor-Elect Jacob Swisher, Past Governors Judy Morris and Rod Obermeier, and Suzi Obermeier for volunteering the day of the event. Thank you, also, to the Emporia Golf Course and especially Marcus Erkel.

Kit Kelley,
Kansas District Chair

All photos courtesy of Judy Morris.



KANSAS DISTRICT JR GOLF QUALIFIER TOURNAMENT



LAWRENCE BREAKFAST ACTIVITIES

In the picture below **Lawrence Breakfast Club** member Marvin Bredehoft is shown investigating the possibility of the club entering a float in next year's St. Patrick's Day Parade in Lawrence, which is a very popular event in the community.



At a recent meeting the **Lawrence Breakfast Club** hosted members of the “Friends of the Hidden Valley Girl Scouts” who spoke to the club.



Club president Matt Dailey presented a \$500 donation to Helen Vilorio for her “Health and Hygiene Pantry” at Central Middle School in Lawrence.

Matt Dailey, President
Lawrence Breakfast Club



FRANKLIN COUNTY ACTIVITIES

In June the **Franklin County Optimists** held their annual Bill Small Franklin County Optimist Jr. Golf event which was a huge success. The program includes instruction for young golfers in chipping, putting, and ball striking. The event concludes with a golf tournament for participants.



Earlier in June youngsters and their families enjoyed the **Franklin County Optimist** Duck Race and Youth Day. Activities included games, crafts, rides on the club's Optimist Train, and, of course, the Duck Races!



LENEXA MOONLIGHT BIKE RIDE

The **Lenexa Optimist Club** completed our 28th Moonlight Bike Ride on July 18th—well, technically, on July 19th in the wee hours of the morning. It was a very successful ride with 791 riders this year and about half of those riders staying for the optional Chris Cakes pancake feed after the ride. This ride has a special feature that's popular with all riders—a roughly 1/2 mile loop underground through one of the area's office/warehouse caves. These caves have semi trucks with trailers coming and going all day, so a few hundred bicyclists at night are easy to accommodate. On a hot summer evening, the cave provides a great way to cool off in the middle of the ride.

This event continues to be a major fund raiser for the Club and has allowed us to be able to get out of the Christmas tree sales business many years ago. The Lenexa Optimist Club initially proposed the idea of a Midnight Bike Ride to Lenexa Parks and Recreation, and we have partnered with the City Parks and Rec every year since then. Over the years, the ride has had several different routes and eventually became the Lenexa Moonlight Bike Ride, and the ride start time moved from midnight to 10pm. Over the past 31 years, only 3 rides have had to be cancelled, one due to road construction along the route, one due to severe storms, and the third due to Covid.

In more recent years, the Club's role has transitioned (due to insurance needs when the City required that eBikes be allowed to participate) from coordinating all aspects of the event to only recruiting and coordinating the volunteers involved in supporting the event. The City shares a portion of the proceeds with the Club.

If other Clubs are considering a partnership with their City to provide a fun, family-friendly event, this is definitely something worth considering. Anyone is interested in learning more about this event, please feel free to contact Jan Soper, Lenexa Club President and Moonlight Bike Ride Volunteer Coordinator at 913.221.5523

Jan Soper
Lenexa Optimist Club

LENEXA MOONLIGHT BIKE RIDE



OLATHE NOON ACTIVITIES

The **Olathe Noon Club** celebrates its 80th anniversary this year. Since 1946 club members have served the needs of young people in their community. In June the club celebrated its 80th birthday with a party that included games, memory sharing, and lots of cake. Then at the July 21 meeting of the Olathe City Council the city and Mayor John Bacon presented the club with a Proclamation declaring July 21, 2026 Olathe Noon Optimist Day in the city. Club President Barbara Cordts spoke to the group about the club's many projects and accepted the Proclamation from the Mayor.



Several members of the **Olathe Noon Club** recently volunteered to help prepare and serve an omelet breakfast to the Journey of Hope TransAmerica Group. These young bikers ride from Seattle to Washington D.C. to raise funds and awareness for people with disabilities.



JUNCTION CITY ACTIVITIES

The **Junction City Breakfast Club** helped sponsor the Ft. Riley Special Needs Rodeo this summer by donating \$200 to purchase t-shirts for participants. The event was held at the 4H Rodeo Campgrounds and hosted by the Exceptional Family Member Program.



Each year the **Junction City Club** sponsors a Junction City High School student to attend the Hugh O'Brian Leadership Camp (HOBY). This year's student was Jaelynn Rhone who was selected by the JCHS staff. The HOBY program was established by the actor in 1958 and allows attendees to participate in leadership training, service learning, and cultural experiences.



TOPEKA CLUBS' ACTIVITIES

Members of the **Topeka Optimist Club** visited the Kansas State Historical Society Archives recently. Their tour guide explained how to request archived information and described some of the items in storage. The group then toured behind the scenes seeing areas such as the video archives, the photo lab, the microfilm room, and the stacks where government documents are stored.



Jaxon Cox built a Blessing Box at the **Sunrise Optimist Club of North Topeka** Event Center for his Eagle Scout project. Club members are excited to add this resource to their community and appreciate Jaxon's hard work and dedication