



Kansas District Newsletter

January 2026

KANSAS DISTRICT OPTIMISTS

2nd Quarter District Meeting

January 23-24, 2026

Arkansas City, KS

Meeting Place:

Buford Theatre

118 S. Summit St.

Arkansas City, KS 67005

Registration and Coffee: Saturday, 8:00 a.m.

Meeting: Saturday, 9:00 a.m.



Join your fellow Optimists for fellowship, fun and good food. Learn about District and Optimist International programs, listen to interesting speakers, and share ideas with other clubs.

Registration due by January 18. A registration form is attached to this newsletter or you can register online at ksoptimist.org. If past deadline, contact District Treasurer Joe Shank (shank9538@gmail.com) for availability.

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,
jimmorris2007@yahoo.com

District Team

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

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

Foundation Rep: Dale Fox,
ddfox1701@yahoo.com

Finance Committee Chair: Charles Galligher,
cgalligher@cox.net

Member: Ruth Nelson,
rnelson1021@sbcglobal.net

Member: Cecil Cunday, cbcundayii@aol.com

International Convention Ambassador: Dave
Bruns, brunsteam@aol.com

Jr. Golf: Kit Kelley, kkelley1099@sbcglobal.net

Leadership Development: Kris Kirkes,
kris.kirkes@simmonsbank.com

Membership Engagement: Rod Obermeier,
obermeirrd@cox.net

Growth: Open

Oratorical: Diana Carlin-Pierron,
dianabcarlin@gmail.com

Essay: Lisa Brummett, the
brummett5@gmail.com

Communication/Social Media/Newsletter:
Mary Griffin, kumoogie@aol.com

Programs/Projects Community: Open

Webmaster/Owner of Site/Mgr.: Erica
Derrington, [ederringtonwdsc@olathe
schools.org](mailto:ederringtonwdsc@olathe
schools.org)

Webmaster/Maintenance: Ruth Nelson,
rnelson1021@sbcglobal.net



Randy Bailes
2025-2026 Governor

**Kansas District Optimist First Quarter
Meeting**

**Burford Theatre
118 S Summit St, Arkansas City, KS
January 23-24, 2026**

Friday, January 23

6:00 p.m. Dinner individually or with the group. Let me know if you want to join.

8:00 p.m. Informal gathering of Optimists – Best Western Hotel, 6100 Patterson Parkway, Arkansas City, KS

Saturday, January 24

8:00 a.m. Registration & Coffee

9:00 a.m. Welcome – Governor Randy Bailes
Posting of Colors – Flag Salute/Pledge
Invocation -
Ark City Greetings –
Recognize First-Timers!!

9:15 a.m. Welcome – Randy Bailes

9:30 a.m. Up Close and Personal (Via Zoom) with President Tom Kendo
Tom Kendo Remarks

10:00 a.m. Break

10:15 a.m. 2025-2026 OI Growth & Retention Recognition Program
Growth -Rick Gillespie, Chair
Engagement – Michael Shue, Chair
Marketing – Lorin Richter, Chair

10:45 a.m. Business Meeting – Governor Randy Bailes
presiding
Approval of Minutes – Secretary Mary Griffin
Approval of Treasurer’s Report – Treasurer Joe Shank
District Leadership Team Reports
Lt. Governor Zone Reports
Old Business
New Business
Adjourn Business Meeting

11:15 a.m. “Sharing Optimism Online”
Zoe Lane, Derby Optimist Club

Noon Lunch – OIF Fundraiser
Ark City Optimists’ Pork Burgers

1:00 p.m. Growing Optimism through Consistent Marketing
Rick Gillespie – OI Growth Committee Chair
Lorin Richter – OI Marketing Committee Chair

1:30 p.m. Kansas Optimist Club Showcase
This segment provides an opportunity for clubs to share and celebrate the many positive initiatives they are undertaking in their communities. Each club is encouraged to highlight their achievements, programs, and the impact they are making locally. The showcase serves as a platform for exchanging ideas, inspiring one another, and recognizing the collective efforts of Optimist Clubs across Kansas.

2:00 p.m. Zone Breakout Meeting

2:30 p.m. Closing Remarks
Creed -Adjourn



MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR RANDY BAILES

Building a Stronger Kansas District: Growth, Retention, and Engagement

As Optimists, our mission is clear: bring out the best in ourselves, our communities, and the world. To achieve this, we must focus on three pillars that sustain and strengthen our organization—growth, retention, and member engagement.

Growth: Broadening Our Horizons

Growth is more than numbers; it's about impact. Every new member brings fresh ideas, energy, and opportunities to serve. Let's:

- **Invite with purpose:** Share your personal story of optimism and how it has made a difference in your life.
- **Leverage community connections:** Partner with local schools, businesses, and civic groups to introduce them to our mission.
- **Celebrate success:** Recognize clubs that bring in new members and share their strategies.

Retention: Keeping Our Family Strong

Retention starts with value. Members stay when they feel connected and appreciated. Consider:

- **Meaningful involvement:** Assign roles that match members' interests and talents.
- **Regular recognition:** A simple "thank you" goes a long way—highlight contributions in meetings and newsletters.
- **Continuous learning:** Offer leadership development and training opportunities to keep members engaged and growing.

MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR RANDY BAILES

Engagement: Inspiring Action

Engagement transforms membership into movement. To keep enthusiasm high:

- **Create memorable experiences:** Plan projects that make a visible difference in your community
- **Foster fellowship:** Social events and networking strengthen bonds beyond meetings
- **Communicate often:** Use newsletters, social media, and personal outreach to keep members informed and inspired.

Upcoming Kansas District Events

Mark your calendars and join us for these exciting opportunities to connect and grow:

2nd Quarter District Conference--Ark City - January 24, 2026- A great chance to share ideas and strengthen our Optimist network

.

3rd Quarter District Conference & District Oratorical Contest-

Olathe – April 25, 2026 -Celebrate youth voices and engage in meaningful discussions.

Together, we can grow stronger, retain our dedicated members, and engage hearts and minds in service. Let's make the Kansas District a beacon of optimism!

Randy Bailes, District Governor
randyb16@cox.net

KANSAS DISTRICT/OI FOUNDATION

OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION NEWS

I would like to highlight some club programs that are available through the Foundation. As you will see, there are some dates coming up soon.

If your club is NOT a 501c3, then the contributions received by your club are NOT tax deductible. However, you can apply to Optimist International Foundation for a Club Pass Through Grant (form is available on the website). This grant application is very simple to fill out, and when done it will enhance the opportunity for raising the money you need for your projects, and they will be tax deductible for the donor.

CLUB GRANT PROGRAM

Any Adult Optimist Club served by OIF is eligible to apply for a NEW project of the club. The range of the grants is \$250 - \$1,000. These are matching grants and are good for 1 year only. The project must start and finish between April, 2026 and March 2027. The time frame for grants in this category is:

January 9, 2026.... Applications are available at oifoundation.org

March 20, 2026.... Applications must have been received in St. Louis office.

May 15, 2026.....Winners will be notified.

CHILDHOOD HEALTH AND WELLNESS GRANT PROGRAM

This grant can be for a NEW OR EXISTING Program. The requested amount ranges from \$250 - \$1,000. These grants have 2 cycles – January 26, 2026, and August 21, 2026. These are the dates that the applications are due in the St. Louis office. Grants are for 1 year from the date you receive them. Applications for this grant must fall into one of these categories:

1. Healthy Lifestyles
2. Chronic Diseases
3. Mental Health
4. Disabilities – Physical, Intellectual & Developmental

KANSAS DISTRICT/OI FOUNDATION (Cont.)

The Franklin County Optimist Club has utilized these grants, and I assure you that they are accessible, and the applications are user friendly. If you have any questions, or concerns, please contact me at ddfox1701@yahoo.com or call me at 785-248-6309

REMEMBER DIME A DAY!

The cost is only \$36.50 for the Year. **Let's show our Kansas Pride as we continue to support our International Foundation.** Our goal for this year is 250 members.

Happy New Year – Hope to see You in Arkansas City.
Yours In Optimism,
Dale Fox, ddfox1701@yahoo.com

OPTIMIST DAY 2026

Optimist Day 2026 will be Thursday, February 5th so now is the time for clubs to plan their activities to celebrate! Optimist Day is held annually on the first Thursday in February and is a day to celebrate Optimism and the difference it makes in our lives and communities. Members of clubs can show their Optimism and how their club helps others by doing a service project, distributing information about Optimists, and wearing Optimist gear. Anyone can celebrate Optimist Day so be sure and invite family and friends to your event to show them how Optimism works in your community. A club also can encourage your community leaders to recognize Optimist Day by issuing a Proclamation to honor the day and celebrate volunteers in their community. A flyer with more information is included at the end of the newsletter, and more information is available on the OI website under Club Resources.



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The Childhood Health & Wellness Committee is pleased to announce that near the end of 2025, the Kansas District donated \$18,500 to the two childhood cancer camps serving Kansas children. \$14,800 was distributed to Camp Quality Kansas, and \$3,700 was given to Kymel (Camp Hope). Thank you to each Kansas District Optimist Club for your generosity and your support of the District Childhood Cancer Golf Tournament held in August 2025.

Please start thinking about how clubs can support the 2026 Childhood Cancer Golf Tournament being held in August by sending a team to play in the tournament, providing silent auction items and/or being a Hole Sponsor the day of the tournament. Planning for the 2026 tournament hasn't started yet, but further details will be disseminated in future newsletters once plans have been finalized.

Marlene Natoli
Health and Wellness
marnatoli@att.net

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

**108th Optimist International
Convention, Jacksonville,
Florida Hyatt Regency
Jacksonville, June 28-July 2,
2026**

The schedule for the Optimist International Convention will be published soon and included in the next newsletter. However, you can already visit the OI website, optimist.org, then under Annual Convention you can make reservations at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Hotel, read about the top attractions in Jacksonville, and request a Jacksonville Visitors Guide.

Dave Bruns,
OI Convention Ambassador, brunsteam@aol.com

KANSAS DISTRICT QUALIFIER-OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL JUNIOR GOLF TOURNAMENT

KANSAS DISTRICT QUALIFIER OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL JUNIOR GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP (OIJGC)

ELIGIBILITY: Open to Girls and Boys 10 - 18 years of age who have not turned 19 on or before July 30, 2026, and may not have attended college. Entry Deadline - 5/30/26

WHEN: June 5th 2026

WHERE: Emporia Golf Course, Emporia Kansas 1133 S HWY 99, 620-343-5610
*Driving Range - balls provided

TO ENTER: Go To - **OPTIMIST JUNIOR GOLF: KANSAS DISTRICT QUALIFIER** or
Optimist International Junior Golf Championship

POSTING: Tournament results posted approx. 1HR after all play is completed at -
www.emporiagolfcourse.com and ASAP Optimist International websites

TEE TIMES: Posted May 31st by 5 PM
Girls All 8:30 - 9:30 AM (Oldest Group First)
Boys 10 - 15 10 AM - 12PM (Oldest Group First)
Boys 16 - 18 12:00 PM All times are approximate and
Requested tee times can be accommodated

OIJGC DATES: July 15 - 20 Boys 10-11, 12-13 and Girls 10-12
2026 July 20 - 25 Boys 14-15 and Girls 13-14
July 25 -30 Boys 16-18 and Girls 15-18

SPONSORSHIP: Girls 13-14 & 15-18 Winner, and Boys 14-15 & 16-18 Winner
Will have entry fee sponsored by Kansas District Optimists

QUALIFYING
SCORES: Equal to or better than and (Available Spots)
Girls 10-12 = 96 (2) Boys 10-11 = 95 (2)
Girls 13-14 = 92 (2) Boys 12-13 = 89 (2)
Girls 15-18 = 84 (2) Boys 14-15 = 82 (2) Boys 16-18 = 77 (5)

YARDAGE: Girls 10-12 = 5000 Boys 10-11 = 5500
Girls 13-14 = 5500 Boys 12-13 = 6000
Girls 15-18 = 6000 Boys 14-15 = 6500 Boys 16-18 = 6800

TROPHIES: 1st - 3rd All Divisions, Plus 4th and 5th for Boys 16-18

NOTE: All participants play 18 holes, pull carts are allowed. Parents may spot and help look for balls but no coaching. Parents may rent a cart but must stay on the cart path.

Kit Kelley
Jr. Golf Chair
kkelley1099@sbcglobal.net

OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL ESSAY AND ORATORICAL CONTESTS

ESSAY CONTEST

The Essay Contest topic for the 2025-2026 year is **“How My Acts of Service Help Me Understand What My Community Means to Me”**. There are excellent resources on the Kansas District website (ksoptimist.org) or the Optimist International website (optimist.org) to help Optimist clubs plan and publicize local essay contests. Or you can contact the District chairperson if you have questions. The winning essay from each club should be submitted to the District chair by February 28, 2026. The District Essay Contest winner receives a \$2,500 college scholarship.

Lisa Brummett
Essay Contest Chairperson
thebrummett5@gmail.com

ORATORICAL CONTEST

It's time for clubs to start recruiting and planning club competitions for the Oratorical Contest. This year's topic is: **“The Moment I Realized I Belonged: My Definition of Community”**. Everything you need to know to plan a contest is found on the OI website under Signature Programs, Scholarship Contests. Clubs should complete their club contests by the end of March with Zone contests in April, culminating in the District Contest at the 3rd Quarter meeting in Olathe on Saturday, April 25th. When you provide information about the contest to schools and students who contact you, be sure to point them to the Guidelines for Oratorical Participants on the OI website. It gives suggestions for writing a winning oration. Your information should remind students that by signing the entry form, they are stating that the work is original and not written by another person or by AI. We will run all speeches through AI detection software. If you need assistance with doing this, please contact Diana Carlin, District Oratorical Chair. Also, if you have any other questions about recruiting students or running the contest after reviewing the OI website, please contact Diana.

Diana Carlin-Pierron
Oratorical Contest Chair, dianabcarlin@gmail.com

KANSAS CLUB HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

The **Manhattan Optimist Club** held their annual Christmas Tree Sale, beginning on Thanksgiving Day. Nearly 800 trees were unloaded at Optimist Park in Manhattan, and the club's first customer was Geraldine Ince who has bought a tree from the club every year for over 40 years. Geraldine is shown in the first photo with her two sons. The club also sold miniature trees for children wanting their own little tree, and opened Santa's Workshop for youngsters, giving every child a gift. Volunteers from the Manhattan Optimist Fastpitch Association helped staff sales shifts, with over 40 coaches, parents, and players from softball teams working.



KANSAS CLUB HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

The **Topeka Optimist Club** adopted the Florence Crittendon Home for Girls for the holidays and delivered gifts for girls at the residence.



The **Flint Hills Optimist Club** continued their annual tradition of a Christmas Tree Lot again this year. Members of the Emporia High School Wrestling Team helped club members unload Christmas trees for the lot.



Longtime **Flint Hills Optimist Club** member Lisa Keith and her husband Brian were selected as Parade Marshals for the Emporia Christmas Parade held on December 2nd. They were chosen by the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce and Visit Emporia for their generosity, leadership, and community spirit.



KANSAS CLUB HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Pam States, a member of the **West Wichita Optimist Club**, is shown ringing bells for the Salvation Army outside a Sam's Club in Wichita. The West Wichita Club has been volunteering at the red kettles on Saturdays between Thanksgiving and Christmas for more than 25 years.



The wonderful smell of pine was in the air as the **Sunrise Optimist Club of North Topeka** raised money by selling Christmas trees again this year.



The **Independence Optimist Club** and Independence Kansas Main Street sponsored their Holiday Parade on Sunday November 23rd. Attendees enjoyed festive floats, music, a visit from Santa, and plenty of holiday cheer during the annual event.



KANSAS CLUB HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Members of the **Junction City Breakfast Club** enjoyed great food, fellowship, and a gift exchange at their holiday gathering.



Providing holiday magic for youngsters, the **Franklin County Optimists** ran their Optimist Train at the Ottawa Mayor's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on November 29th.



Members of the **Manhattan Optimist Club** gathered for their annual Christmas Breakfast on December 17th. The Manhattan Pops Choir provided the entertainment and Santa paid a visit as members celebrated the season!



KANSAS CLUB ACTIVITIES

Several members of the **Topeka Optimist Club** helped at North Topeka Out Reach's "Pack a Sack for Kids" event. Over 50 volunteers from various organizations packed 3500 sacks in one hour!



Congratulations to Wesley Johnson, first place winner of the Hoop, Holler and Shoot Free Throw Contest sponsored by the **Manhattan Optimist Club**. The competition took place during half-time at a K-State basketball game. Second place winner was Avi Lindbergh and third place winner Henry Robke.



In December the **Junior Optimist Club of Junction City High School** held a fundraiser at Freddy's to raise money for a scholarship for a graduating senior at their high school. The restaurant donated 20% of the sales from the event to the club.





**Kansas District 37 – Optimist International:
2nd Quarter District Conference
January 23-24, 2026**



Meeting Place:
Burford Theatre
118 S Summit St
Arkansas City, KS 67005

CONFERENCE FEES:	QUANTITY	COST	TOTAL
Covers the cost of room rental, conference materials and lunch		\$20.00	
Attending but not eating lunch		\$5.00	
I will not be attending, but would like to donate:		\$10.00	
TOTAL Conference Fees:			

Member Name: _____ Club Name: _____

Club Number: _____ Club &/or District Position: _____

Member Name: _____ Club Name: _____

Club Number: _____ Club &/or District Position: _____

Spouse/Guest Name(s): _____

Please provide a contact phone number: _____

Please note any special dietary/physical needs: _____

Please check if you will be attending your FIRST District Meeting: ☐

Please return Registration forms to:

**Kansas District Optimist
6119 Noland Road
Shawnee, KS 66216**

Please return this form by: Jan. 18, 2026

Please arrange for your overnight accommodations directly with:

**Best Western Hotel
6100 Patterson Parkway
Arkansas City, KS 67005
620-307-6704 or 6767**

Rate: \$115 + taxes

***** IMPORTANT NOTICE! *** IMPORTANT NOTICE! *****

To receive this Special Optimist Rate mention Kansas District Optimist, reservations must be made by:

12/29/25



Celebrate Optimist Day!

Be part of the celebration on the first Thursday of February to spread positivity and showcase the power of optimism in our communities.

Adopt an Optimist Mindset: Practice gratitude, spread kindness, and look for the good in every situation. Inspire others by sharing your optimistic outlook with friends, family, and colleagues.

Make a Difference: Plan a meaningful project—plant trees, clean parks, tutor students, or host a blood drive. Small actions inspire big change!

Share the Joy: Post on social media with [#OptimistDay](#) and [#OptimistDay2026](#) and reach out to local media to share your story.

Together, we can make Optimist Day a celebration of hope, kindness, and positivity—within ourselves and our communities!



OPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CONTESTS 2025-2026



Topic
"The Moment I Realized I Belonged
—My Definition of Community"

ORATORICAL CONTEST

Beginning in 1928, the Oratorical Contest has become the longest-running program of Optimist International. The contest is designed for young people to gain experience in public speaking and provide them with an opportunity to compete for multiple college scholarships with a pre-assigned topic.

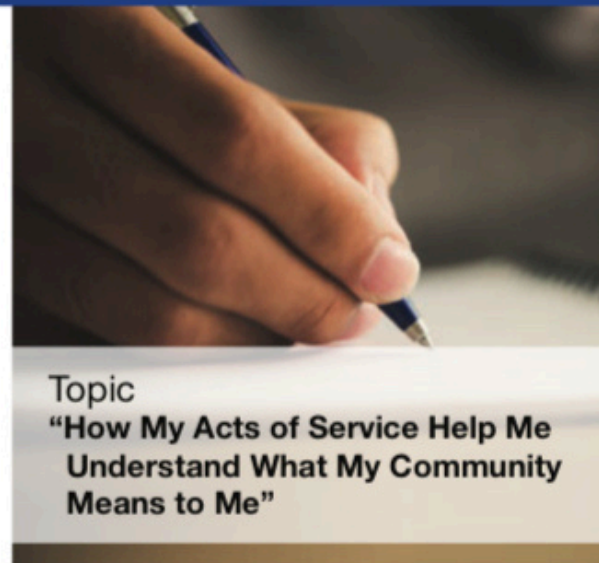
District Scholarships:
First Place: \$2,500 • Second Place: \$1,500 • Third Place: \$1,000
**with a chance to win up to \$22,500 at the
World Championships level**

ESSAY CONTEST

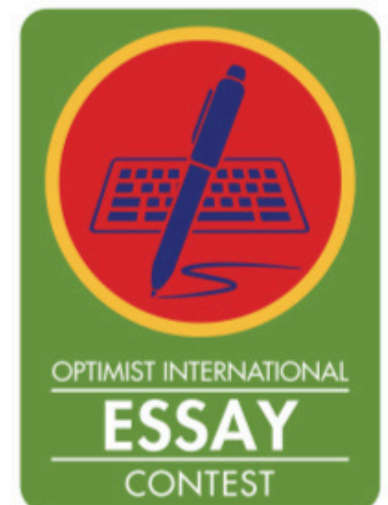
The Essay Contest is sponsored by Optimist International to give young people the opportunity to write about their own opinions regarding the world in which they live.

The approach can encompass a young person's personal experience, the experience of their country or a more historical perspective. In addition to developing skills for written expression, participants also have the opportunity to win a college scholarship!

One District Scholarship of \$2,500



Topic
"How My Acts of Service Help Me
Understand What My Community
Means to Me"



COMMUNICATION CONTEST FOR THE DEAF & HARD OF HEARING

This contest offers an opportunity for students who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing to present their thoughts in the community, gaining skills, which can only come from signing or speaking to a large audience. Patterned after the Optimist Oratorical Contest, the contest offers youth the chance to compete in speech or sign language with the chance to win a college scholarship.

One District Scholarship of \$2,500



Topic
"The Moment I Realized I Belonged
—My Definition of Community"

KIDS SPEAK OUT! SPEECH CONTEST

All young people can compete in the Optimist Oratorical Contest. The "Kids Speak Out" contest is a "pre-Oratorical" program that provides a more equitable competition for younger speakers.



Follow complete Official Rules posted on www.optimist.org



2025-2026 PRESIDENTIAL INCENTIVE PROGRAM

CLUB RECOGNITION

Merit Club

- Grow Club by Net +0 members (Maintain beginning October 1 membership count)
- Make a non-restricted contribution to the OIF or CCOF of at least \$100
- Be current on District and International dues and fees

Honor Club

- Meet Merit Club Requirements plus Grow Club by Net +3 members

Distinguished Club

- Meet Honor Club Requirements plus one of the following:
 - Grow Club by Net +15 (inclusive of 3 Honor Club members)
 - Charter a one or more new Clubs

DISTRICT RECOGNITION

Merit District

- Grow District by Net +10 members
- Raise \$7,500 in non-restricted contributions to the OIF or CCOF
- All District reports filed with Optimist International as required

Honor District

- Grow District by:
 - Net+10 members and Build 1 new Club or
 - Grow District by Net +25 (inclusive of 10 members from Merit District)
- Raise \$7,500 in non-restricted contributions to the OIF or CCOF
- All District reports filed with Optimist International as required

Distinguished District

- Grow District by:
 - Net +25 members and Build 3 new Clubs or
 - Grow District by Net +70 (inclusive of 25 members from Honor District)
- Raise \$10,000 in non-restricted contributions to the OIF or CCOF
- All District reports filed with Optimist International as required

Club & District Incentives will be fulfilled through the Optimist Merch Store.

ADDITIONAL AWARDS

Governor Pacesetter Award

- Grow District by Net+15 in membership by June 30. And Charter two or more new adult clubs by June 30.

Builder of Excellence

- Up to 4 Builders of Excellence can be named for each new adult Club, regardless of the number of Sponsor Clubs. Up to two Builders of Excellence can be named for a Club within a Club. (Medallion for first BOE with a Ribbon Star thereafter)

Club Tracking Form

Club Name & Club Number

Oct. 1 Membership: Sept. 30 Membership:

MERIT CLUB

STEPS TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

1. Grow Club by Net + 0 members (Maintain beginning October 1 membership count)
2. Make a non-restricted contribution to the OIF or CCOF of at least \$100
3. Be current on District and International dues and Fees

HONOR CLUB

STEPS TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

1. Meet Merit Club Requirements PLUS Grow Club by Net + 3 Members

DISTINGUISHED CLUB

STEPS TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

1. Meet Honor Club Requirements PLUS one of the following:
 - Grow Club by New + 15 members (including 3 members from Honor Club)
 - Charter one or more new Clubs

DUES

International Dues			
First Quarter Due Date Dec. 31	Date Paid	Second Quarter Due Date Mar. 31	Date Paid
Third Quarter Due Date June 30	Date Paid	Fourth Quarter Due Date Sept. 30	Date Paid

District Dues			
	Date Paid		Date Paid

FOUNDATION

Club Foundation Representative:

Amount Donated: (Min. of \$100)



Signature _____ Date _____ Signature _____ Date _____
Lt. Governor Club President