



Optimist International WINUM DISTRICT *Newsletter*

Second Quarter
January 2026

Governor Vanessa's Message

Vanessa Rueth — 2025-26 WINUM Governor

“Be the Change” • “Stand Tall, Face the Sun”

As we welcome a brand new year, I'm filled with excitement for everything the WINUM District has already accomplished — and everything we're about to take on together. Our 1st Quarter Conference in November set the tone beautifully. We were honored to have Vice President Tom Lloyd and his wife Janet join us, bringing encouragement, warmth, and a wonderful reminder of the strength of our Optimist network.



2025-26 Governor
Vanessa Rueth

We were inspired by our keynote speaker, Elsa Duranceau from the Child Care Coalition of Wisconsin (3CWi), whose message challenged us to think boldly about the impact we can make. We also kicked off the first session of the four-part D.R.E.A.M. training, led by Jodi Arriola, and I'm already looking forward to seeing how this series will strengthen our clubs and our leadership throughout the year. You'll find photos from the conference throughout this newsletter — snapshots of the joy, connection, and purpose that define who we are.

Over the past few months, I've had the privilege of attending numerous club officer installations. Each visit has been a joy. Meeting so many dedicated Optimists and hearing about the incredible work happening across our district is truly my favorite part of this role. Every club is unique, every project is meaningful, and every member brings something special to their community. That spirit is what makes WINUM shine.

I'm also thrilled to share that as of December 29, our district is up a net 7 in membership. That growth is a direct reflection of your enthusiasm, your outreach, and your belief in the power of optimism. Thank you for continuing to welcome new faces and new energy into our mission.

As we step into the new year, let's carry forward the spirit of our themes: “Be the Change” — because every act of service begins with one person deciding to make a difference. “Stand Tall, Face the Sun” — because optimism is a choice we make every day, no matter the challenge.

A Call to Action for 2026

Let's keep this momentum going. Reach out to a new member. Start a fresh project. Reignite an old idea. Lift up another club. Share your optimism boldly. When we stand tall together and face the sun, there is nothing this district cannot achieve.

Here's to a bright, hopeful, and action-packed year ahead.

QUESTIONS for WINUM Governor? Contact Vanessa Rueth at 715-218-8608 or vanessar.optimist@gmail.com.



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WINUM 2nd Quarter (Condensed!) Conference

February 28, 2026

Central WI Convention+Expo Center,
10101 Market Street, Rothschild, WI 54474



Optimist
INTERNATIONAL



Name _____ Address _____ City, State, Zip _____

E-mail address _____ Phone _____
Is this your first conference? _____

Club Name _____ Zone # _____ Your 2025-26 office (if any) _____

REGISTRATION INFO *(Fees are discounted for this condensed conference only)*

	Advance	On Site	Number	Total \$
	(by Feb 21st)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Registration & Saturday Lunch <i>Menu: tba</i> (all menus are subject to change)	\$50.00	\$55.00	_____	_____

Spouse/Guest/Child (non-members)	Name(s): _____			
<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Lunch <i>Menu: tba</i> (all menus are subject to change)	\$25.00	\$30.00	_____	_____

TOTAL ENCLOSED (Make checks payable to WINUM District) \$ _____

THREE WAYS TO REGISTER:

1. Register on-line at www.WinumOptimists.org. Pay with a credit card thru PayPal.
2. Register on-line at www.WinumOptimists.org and indicate that you'll pay onsite. Then bring cash/check to the meeting!
3. Snail mail your check & this form to: WINUM Conference Chair Laurel Schirmer, 1807 North 6 Street, Sheboygan, WI 53081

If you would like to request a special meal *due to specific food allergies* please indicate: YES NO
Type of meal required: _____. Every effort will be made to accommodate special needs.

If you have any questions, please call Laurel at 920-946-7246 or e-mail: schirmerlaurel@gmail.com

NO ROOM BLOCK HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR THIS CONDENSED CONFERENCE.

Tentative start time is 10am, allowing ample time for members to drive to Rothschild on the day of the meeting. If you choose to stay overnight in the area (no reimbursements will be approved), there are several properties near the convention center: Holiday Inn, Cedar Creek Hotel, EconoLodge, Best Western+, and Bantr Grand Hotel Wausau.

Tentative Agenda
2nd Quarter Conference
February 28, 2026
Central Wisconsin Convention & Expo Center
10101 Market Street
Rothschild, WI 54474

Friday, February 27, 2026

No Events. No overnight hotel stay.

Saturday, February 28, 2026

No Past Governor's Breakfast

9:00 am – Check-in

9:30 am – First Timers Meeting: We have a gift for you!

10:00 am – Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance and First Timers Introductions

10:20 am - General Session Leadership Reports and Board Meeting

Board of Directors Meeting: All members of the District Executive Board and all Club Presidents (or their representatives) are voting members of the board and should be present to conduct any business of the district.

11:00 am – Something fun!

11:15 am – Roundtable/Discussion (TBD)

11:45 am Purchase Raffle Tickets

Noon-1 pm – Lunch & Optimist Foundation Raffle Baskets

1:00 pm – Awards Presentation – Angie Riemer

1:15 pm – Break

1:30 pm – Training: DREAM-Session 2 “Leadership Nuts and Bolts” with Jodi Arriola

2:30 pm – TOWN HALL meeting

3:00 pm - Optimist Creed & Farewell

Scavenger Hunt at the Museum, OI Vice President, 3CWi Speaker, Skit, DREAM Training & CONNECTIONS at 1st Quarter Conference



Nov. 14-15, 2025
 Merrill Historical Society, Americinn,
 Les & Jim's Lincoln Lanes, Merrill



Bring Children's Comfort Items for Kids in Crisis

Vanessa Rueth — 2025-26 Governor

At our upcoming district conference in February, we're inviting all attendees to take part in a meaningful community project that will directly support children in the Rothschild and Wausau area.

These items — simple things like stuffed animals, blankets, coloring books, and small toys — play a powerful role in helping children feel safe and supported during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. First responders and child-advocacy professionals use these comfort items every day, and the need is ongoing, especially during the winter months.

A donation table will be available throughout the conference. We encourage each attendee to bring one or more new items from the suggested list. Every contribution, big or small, helps brighten a child's day and reminds them that their community cares.

We invite all conference attendees to bring one or more new items from the list below. A donation table will be available throughout the conference, and all items will be donated to a children's program in the Rothschild and Wausau area that is still being determined.

Together, we can make a meaningful difference for local children who need comfort and care, and we can make a real difference to children who need comfort, reassurance, and a little extra kindness.

Suggested Donation Item List

Most-Needed Items

- Small stuffed animals (new only)
- Fleece blankets (child-size)
- Coloring books
- Crayon packs
- Small puzzles
- Fidget toys
- Board books or early-reader books
- Stress balls
- Play-Doh (single containers)

Optional Extras

- Child-safe headphones
- Sticker sheets
- Journals or notebooks
- Child-friendly water bottles
- Soft socks (new, child sizes)

Please avoid

- Used items
- Toys with violent themes
- Anything with strong scents
- Large or bulky items that are hard to store

Thank you!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2025-26 Conferences & Convention WINUM District

November 14-15, 2025 (1st Quarter Conference)

Hotel: AmeriInn Conference: Les & Jim's Lincoln Lanes
1st Quarter Newsletter Articles Due: Oct. 1, 2025

February 28, 2026 (2nd Quarter Mini Conference)

Central Wisconsin Convention & Expo Center,
10101 Market St, Rothschild
2nd Quarter Newsletter Articles Due: Jan. 5, 2026

April 24-25, 2026 (3rd Quarter Conference)

Comfort Suites/Rock Garden, 1951 Bond St, Green Bay
3rd Quarter Newsletter Articles Due: March 9, 2026

August 21-22, 2026 (4th Quarter Convention)

Hotel: Comfort Inn & Suites, 5810 Schofield Avenue, Weston
Conference: Dale's Weston Lane (next door to hotel), Weston
4th Quarter Newsletter Articles Due: June 22, 2026

Membership Retention

Ann Sheahan,
2025-26 Membership Chair



The WINUM District finished the first quarter at plus 5 members. We encourage clubs to keep your rosters current with both additions and deletions. Nothing is more detrimental than seeing a large number of resignations at the end of September without time for replacements.

Always strive to replace lost members, or try to retain those who express or hint at leaving. It's difficult for most people to quit or resign, so perhaps some encouragement to try again will retain that valued member, making your club even more successful.

Cheers to 2026 and a positive outlook for your club and district! Stand tall and face the sun.

MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONS? Contact Ann Sheahan at gsheahan@charter.net.

DREAM Session 2: Leadership Nuts and Bolts

Jodi Arriola — 2025-26 Leadership Development Chair

At the WINUM 1st quarter conference, the Dream curriculum was introduced to our membership with the completion of the Know Yourself module. Self-awareness was explored as the foundation of personal growth, helping individuals understand their emotions, values and behaviors and how they contribute to making intentional decisions and building stronger relationships. Tools like the DISC personality model offer insights into communication styles and behavioral tendencies, enhancing self-understanding and interpersonal effectiveness. By identifying core values, recognizing strengths, and addressing areas for improvement, individuals can align their actions with their true selves and pursue meaningful growth. Incorporating mindfulness and regular reflection further deepens this awareness, promoting well-being and a more balanced, fulfilling life.

Session 2: Leadership Nuts and Bolts of the DREAM series will be offered at the WINUM 2nd quarter conference. During this session, the concept of leadership will be explored through a discussion of core leadership skills and ethical leadership characteristics that each of us as Optimists can use to support our clubs, communities and our own growth in Leadership.

Session 3: Encourage the Heart will be the topic of the 3rd quarter conference and Session 4: Encouraging Others will be offered 4th quarter. I look forward to seeing you at all four sessions.

LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS? Contact Jodi Arriola at arrioljm@uwec.edu



Jodi Arriola

District Oratorical Contest at 3rd Quarter Conference

If your club is planning to host an Oratorical Contest, email Chuck at chuck@collegeconnectors.com before February 15 (LAST CALL). I have only heard from the Green Bay area and the Wausau Noon clubs. Anyone else?

The 3rd Quarter WINUM conference will host the 2026 District Oratorical Contest in Green Bay on Saturday, April 25, in the morning. For more information <https://www.optimist.org/member/scholarships4.cfm>.

The Topic for the OI Oratorical Contest this year is: **“The Moment I Realized I Belonged — My Definition of Community”**.

The Purpose: The contest is designed to provide youth with the opportunity to gain experience in public speaking, perfect self-expression, build self-assurance, improve communication skills, and compete for a college scholarship.

Funding: The Optimist Oratorical Scholarships are funded by member donations to the Optimist International Foundation. It is important that all members understand the significance of supporting the Foundation in order to continue funding the contest.

Who: The contest is open to contestants under 19 as of October 1st of the current Optimist International contest year (October 1 – September 30) who have not yet completed high school. There is no minimum age.

Club Contests: A club may be represented at the District by no more than two qualified contestants. There is no minimum required number of participants for club contests. Here is the Oratorical Contest - Club Planning Guide: [https://www.optimist.org/Documents/2025/programs/25-26 Oratorical Club Planning Guide.pdf](https://www.optimist.org/Documents/2025/programs/25-26%20Oratorical%20Club%20Planning%20Guide.pdf).

District Contests: Each winner of the District level contest will receive a scholarship for use at a college, university, or trade school only. There will be three winners awarded scholarships of \$2,500, \$1,500, and \$1,000, respectively, for first, second, and third place. District contests must have at least three participants.

The winner will repeat their oratorical speech during the conference lunch, with the 1st place winner attending the World Championship in St. Louis.

ORATORICAL CONTEST QUESTIONS? Contact Chuck Erickson at chuck@collegeconnectors.com.



Chuck Erickson

Optimist Foundation Grants Available

Troy Dostal — 2025-26 OI Foundation Representative

Hello WINUM Optimist,

Happy New Year! Now that we are at the beginning of 2026 and we all have our new calendars, planners, or electronic devices to keep us organized, I want you all to add a few important dates into your preferred organization method. First one is "Childhood Health & Wellness Grant Deadline" of January 30, 2026 (also can add August 21, 2026 since you are adding dates). This is the date OIF must receive the application. This simple application can help your club with funding of a project that your club might do related to Childhood Health & Wellness. This grant is a matching grant with a minimum of \$250 and a maximum of \$1,000. The project can be already established and one that your club currently does.

The second date to add is "Club Grant Program Deadline" which is March 20, 2026. Again, this is the date when OIF needs to receive the application. The application is available starting 1/9/2026. Both these applications are available on <https://www.oifoundation.org/> under "Community Impact". There are also application directions for the "Childhood Health & Wellness" application.

I want to point out a few things that OI Foundation was able to do with our donations:

- Assisted Clubs in receiving \$355,757 in charitable contributions for their own local programs through the Pass Through program.
- Sent 134 students off to college with Optimist International oratorical, essay, and CCDHH scholarships totaling \$252,500.
- Paid out \$454,096 to clubs utilizing the Club Campaign program and added an additional \$100,963 in interest to the Club Campaign funds.
- Assisted 320 Optimists to help 20,957 children and their families by awarding 19 Club Grants.

You can view the full list as well as previous years by going to <https://www.oifoundation.org/10-accomplishments.html>.

You can support the OI Foundations mission and help the youth by contributing to a "Dime-A-Day" level. Your unrestricted donation of \$36.50 gets you membership in Dime-A-Day for that year. You can find the "Dime-A-Day" form at <https://www.oifoundation.org/individuals.html> or donate online at <https://www.oifoundation.org/us-canada-donate.cfm> and select "Dime-A-Day Pin." You can also bring the form/check to a conference, and I will be happy to get it sent into OIF on your behalf. "Thank you for being the change you wish to see."

Please reach out to me if you have any questions on other items that OIF offers such as pass-through program, club campaign, etc. I am happy to assist with any questions you have or help you start using these wonderful tools to work smarter and not harder.

Reminder to clubs/members: Bring raffle baskets to the next quarterly conference.

Thank you for everything you do for Optimists, especially in our communities. "Your dedication to making the world a better place inspires us all."

OI FOUNDATION QUESTIONS? Contact Troy Dostal at dostalt@live.com or 715-531-5085.



Troy Dostal

Save the Date!

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

Don't miss this opportunity to hear motivational speakers, attend workshops, speak at the town hall and business meeting, and meet, network, and socialize with

Optimists from around the world!
[Visit the OI website for more details.](#)

Essay Contest Info Online

Shannon Dalton — 2025-26 Essay Contest Chair

It's the time of year again to hold your essay contests if you choose to do so. All the information you need is on the [Optimist International website](#). It is under the tab "Signature Programs" and then "Scholarship Contests".

You can have your club contest due date when you want, but you need your winners to me by Feb. 28th. Let's just do all digital this year. I used to like a hard copy because it's easier for judging, but not everyone is a fan of mailing those. Thanks.

ESSAY CONTEST QUESTIONS? Email Shannon at shannon@wickershamjewelry.com.



Shannon Dalton

Time for Tri-Star Basketball Competition

Logan Krueger — 2025-26 Tri-Star Basketball Chair

It is time once again for the WINUM Optimist Clubs Tri-Star Basketball Competition. This is my second year as the leader of this group, and I am excited to pass the information on to you.

Please contact me to receive the registration form to fill out after you have completed your local competition.

Here are the details for this event:

Location: Bessie Allen Middle School Gymnasium
305 McKinley Street
Enter Main Entrance
North Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Date and Time: Saturday, April 18, 2026

Registration: 9:00 AM

Competition: 10:00 AM

Conclusion by: 12:00 PM

Cost: \$12.00 per entrant

Each club is limited to one boy and one girl from each age group. Maximum of 12 entries per club. Please make payment to *North Fond du Lac Optimist*. Each age group, both boys and girls, will receive trophies for 1st, 2nd and 3rd places.

Club Registration forms listing each participant must be received by April 1, 2026 for inclusion in the printed program and entry in the official tabulation PC program. Do not send us the forms that you used in scoring your local contest. New forms must be filled out and signed by a parent or guardian. Do not forget to mark either the boy or girl category and fill in the age as of March 15, 2026. Late entries will not be accepted unless previous authorization is granted.

We are looking forward to hosting your club at this annual event.

TRI-STAR BASKETBALL QUESTIONS? Contact Logan Krueger at lkrueger@vesta.cpa or 920.904.7179



Zone Reports

2025-2026 Zones:

Zone 1: Hallie, Chippewa Falls, Superior, Bloomer, UW-Eau Claire, Neillsville

Zone 2: Wausau Noon, Merrill, DC Everest Area, Wausau Breakfast, Antigo, Stevens Point, Mosinee

Zone 3: Green Bay, Howard Suamico, Green Bay- Bellevue, Green Bay - Allouez, Green Bay-Preble, Green Bay Breakfast, De Pere, Pulaski Krakow, Shawano, Sturgeon Bay

Zone 4: Hilbert-Potter, Kewaunee, Kiel, New Holstein, Two Rivers

Zone 5: Greenleaf-Wrightstown, Sherwood Area, Appleton, Oshkosh, Chilton, Brillion

Zone 6: Fond Du Lac, Fond Du Lac-Noon, North Fond Du Lac, Plymouth, Sheboygan

ZONE 1 Lt. Governor: Deb Braden

Chippewa Falls Optimist Club: The Chippewa Falls Club held their dictionary project in late October. They gave away over 500 dictionaries to third graders in Chippewa County. They also took shifts and rang the bell for the Salvation Army continuously on Dec. 12, and raised over \$1,000 for this worthy cause. Member The club held a Christmas party complete with games, prizes, food and special music on December 20.



Lt. Gov. Deb Braden



Third graders who received dictionaries from Chippewa Falls Club

The club also recognizes a Youth of the Month every month and celebrated the International Students attending the two Chippewa Falls High Schools at a meeting in November. Six members of the club attended the WINUM District Conference in Merrill, *photo on Page 4.* *Cont. on Page 9*

Zone Reports *Cont. from Page 8*

Hallie Optimist Club was excited to have WEAU TV cover their Breakfast with Santa on Dec. 13. [Here is a link to their story.](#) The volunteer crew is pictured below with Santa.



The Hallie Club also recently inducted two new members into the club.

2024-25 Lt. Governor Louise Bentley contributed to this report.

ZONE 2 Lt. Governor Mary Sue Edens Pfantz

The **Antigo Optimist Club** held their annual membership Christmas Gathering with annual awards. Larry Ehlert was selected as the Optimist of the Year. You will often see Larry setting up and working in the cheese curd trailer and serving as a Day Chair at the Fair. Larry is a long-time Optimist member and also serves on the board.



Mary Sue Edens Pfantz

One of their new members, Jazmin Maki, was selected as Rookie of the Year. Jazmin joined the club last year and was recently elected to the board and will serve as the club treasurer. Congratulations Larry & Jazmin!

The Antigo Optimist Club would like to recognize and thank two outgoing board members, Angie Close and Joe Husnick. Both Angie and Joe have been instrumental in the continued success of the club, helping out at many events throughout the year and being dedicated members of the board.

The club sponsored Santa visits at the Langlade County Historical Society in December. They also served their "almost" famous cheese curds throughout the day and evening on Dec. 3 during the Chili Cook Off and Christmas parade, and at the Trunk or Treat event. All kiddos in a costume received a FREE kid's size of the club's cheese curds. Regular-sized curds were purchased for \$7.

A big thank you to those who came to the McKenzie Palace Movie Theatre in Antigo on Sunday, Dec 29. The club sponsored the movie "How the Grinch Stole Christmas". Antigo High School Junior Optimist Club members braved the cold with bell ringing in support of the Salvation Army of Antigo.

A future event will be the Annual Optimist Tree Burn & Food Pantry Drive on Jan 13 at 5:00 p.m. at Antigo High School.

Everest Area Optimist Club: From October through December of 2025, the Everest Area Optimist Club conducted the following activities and events. At their Dec. 19, 2025 meeting they held a holiday party, and on Dec. 14 they had a Packer Party Social and new member event. The club also honored several Students of the Month and interesting speakers.

On October 17, 2025 the club held the Wausau Cyclones Hockey 50-50 and Puck Fundraiser. Also in October, they held the Monster Bash, a prelude to Halloween put on by the Mountain Bay Metro Police Department. The club served cheese curds and burgers.

Merrill Optimist Club: On Nov 19, 2025 the Merrill Optimist Club had Judge Jessica Fehrenbach, new and first female judge with Lincoln County as their speaker. To say Lincoln County Judicial system is lucky to have her is an understatement, we'd all agree.

The Merrill Optimists presented the movie, "Zootopia 2" on Dec. 13. Kids 18 and under got in free and accompanying adults were \$2.00. Two showings were available that day, 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. Attendees won candy at the 10:30 a.m. showing.

The club honored Youth Optimist of the Month in both November and December.

On Nov. 2, a group of Merrill Optimists attended the annual Food For Kids Banquet where they were honored to receive the Partner of the Year award. The club is so grateful for this group that helps ensure area kids have food for the weekends, and are happy to do their part to make sure their kids have the food they deserve.

Merrill's 31th Annual Make a Difference Day (MADD) was held on Saturday October 25, 2025.

The club has been fortunate enough to give back to the community recently through playground upgrades for local organizations and schools. They made a donation to NTC Christian Academy in support of their new playground project.

Mosinee Optimist Club: On Dec. 13, the Mosinee Club members met at Gorski's Restaurant to celebrate Christmas. A collection was taken from the members present, which was a match by the club, and donated to the Circle of Joy food pantry. A donation was also made to the Community Center of Hope food pantry.

On Dec. 6, the club ran the food stand (Mrs. Claus' Kitchen) at the annual Mosinee Chamber of Commerce Craft Show. Sandwiches, loaded potatoes, and drinks were served.

The **Stevens Point Club** had a busy first quarter. The club took part in the Boys and Girls Club of Portage County Trunk or Treat event. There were over 400 attendees at this fun community event.

During National Education Week, the club handed out over 500 dictionaries to third grade students attending the 12 elementary schools in Stevens Point. Members presented dictionaries to students at each school. Students were excited to look up the word Optimism.

Zone Reports

Cont. from Page 9

One of Steven Point's goals for the year was to clean their storage unit. Three members volunteered to make this happen. They had a gas grill, two large Nesco's and an inflatable Santa that went into the Baked Goods Auction, which took place on Dec. 3. Members are asked to bake their favorite recipes. There was a professional auctioneer, and there was a way to buy special cards to pass the bid to other members. This is a fun event as everyone goes home with wonderful holiday baked items. One rum cake went for \$65, and the club raised \$992. This includes the items from the storage unit. The funds from this event went to the Holiday Basket Project. They sponsored two families from the community that received baskets.

The club presented three 6th grade students with the Stevens Point Noon Optimist Youth Recognition Award. Each student is invited to lunch along with their parents and two school representatives. Students receive a plaque and \$50 of Portage County Gift Certificates.

Wausau Noon Optimist (WNO) Club: Since the last newsletter, the Wausau Noon Club has held several events. They participated in "Trunk or Treat" in October, and attended the WINUM District 1st Quarter Conference in Merrill in November. In December they were entertained by Wausau West Singers; WNO supports the "Community Ambassadors through Music" local fundraising group which supports student musicians via concerts. They also had a Kids Pinata Party, benefiting "Children with Cancer" and the Neighbors Place. Finally, they held a food drive for Wausau Neighbor's Place with canned goods or monetary donations.

First quarter, they honored students in five Wausau Schools. Fifth grade teachers nominate two students from each school, and talk about the achievements of the students. Students receive a plaque and a gift certificate to Janke Bookstore. The club is looking forward to the Youth Fisheree to be held Sunday, Jan. 25 at Rookery Park, Noon-3:00 p.m. Optimist will drill the holes for fishing, supply the tip ups if needed, and hot dogs and hot chocolate (w/donation) will be available. Prizes and door prizes will be awarded and The Fish of the Day will be selected by the judges and mounted by Dave's Wildlife Taxidermy. The Ice Youth Fisheree showcases the Wausau Noon Optimists' mission in action: bringing out the best in kids through joyful, meaningful service.

The club will also hold the OI Essay Contest, and the WNO State Boys Invitational Basketball Tournament, Jan. 31-Feb. 1. There will be 80-90 teams of boys ranging from 3rd to 8th grade.

ZONE 3 Lt. Governor: Ben Elsner

De Pere Optimist Club held their annual Fall Festival Nov. 7. Food included appetizers, carved turkey and prime rib, along with samples of craft beer, fine wines, and artisan cheeses. Raffle baskets and a silent auction were also part of the event.



Lt. Gov. Ben Elsner

Green Bay Optimist Club: On Dec. 8, the Green Bay Club held their Holiday Party and Movie Night featuring "Elf" at the Tarlton Theatre. Paul Strand was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award, *see photo on right*. He was club president twice, club secretary for countless terms, ran the Green Bay fantasy golf league, and coordinated involvement in the Green Bay Parade. The event brought in close to 30 people.



The Green Bay Optimists participated in the Green Bay Holiday Parade on Nov. 22. They have been a part of this parade for almost 40 years.

Green Bay Allouez Club: On Nov. 4, the Green Bay Allouez Club held Give-a-Kid-a-Book. They joined in on the annual campaign to collect and distribute new books to low-income children during the holidays. *Photo is shown on the right*. This is in collaboration with the Friends of the Brown County Library.



The Allouez Optimists joined with the Green Bay Packers for an NFL Play 60 event Oct. 29 that aligned with the Optimist values of giving back along with staying active and spreading optimism.

Green Bay Breakfast Club: Green Bay Breakfast Club will hold a Boys & Girls Club event on Jan. 14.

Howard Suamico Club: The Howard-Suamico Optimist Club held their Pelkin's Brat Fry on Nov. 15 to support the local youth and enjoy some delicious food.

Save the Date for the Fore the Kids Golf Classic on June 16.

Shawano Optimist Club: The Shawano Optimists joined the Holiday Stroll and annual tree lighting at Franklin Park Nov. 29. They handed out toys in collaboration with Toys for Tots, goodie bags, and milk (donated by the FFA in Shawano) or Sundrop. Nearly 350 goodie bags were given out during the event, *a photo is on right*.



Rose Day was held Nov. 19. The Shawano Optimists sold over

Zone Reports

Cont. from Page 10

400 dozen during this annual fundraiser.

Shawano is excited to host their 50th Anniversary Banquet on Oct. 10. Save the date!

March 10 they will hold the Scholastic Awards Banquet honoring Shawano High School students who have achieved academic success. They will be participating in Tri-Star Basketball with the girls' tournament Jan. 31 and the boys' tournament Feb. 28.

ZONE 4 Lt. Governor: Roger Phillippi

Kewaunee Optimist Club: Kewaunee is planning their yearly Bike Safety Program the first or second Saturday in June. This is organized with the Kewaunee Police Department. Sometime in April they will sponsor an annual breakfast for the Kewaunee high school seniors.

The **New Holstein Optimist Club** was kept very busy this past Christmas with their annual cut-out cookie sale, adopting a section of Kiwanis Park to light up for Christmas and offering an opportunity for kids to decorate their own cut-out cookie at Country Christmas, *see photo on right*, all the first weekend in December.

They continue to be very active in the fundraising portion of their Playground Project. With the grants, matching grants, community donations and fundraising events this past year, they have surpassed the 75% mark of their goal. With several fundraising events this winter and a few grant opportunities they hope to exceed their goal by the start of spring so the next stage of the project will take place – ordering the equipment, with placement this summer. And it's all for the kids of all ages.

Two Rivers Optimist Club: The Two Rivers Club started the new Optimist Year by supporting area youth and their families by making and serving breakfast sandwiches at the City of Two Rivers 1st Annual Beach Camp Out, *as pictured on right*. Past Governor Tammy Koehler was their special guest for their Club Installation & Awards Night. They also honored their local fire department during Fire Prevention Week with personal thank you notes and a donation to their Youth Fire Safety Program.

November had them serving fish at their first ever Fish Fry



Lt. Gov. Roger Phillippi



event which raised funds for their youth events. Their High School Junior Optimist International (JOI) Club held a very successful electronic recycling event and rang bells for the Salvation Army. December offered them the opportunity to gather as a club to celebrate the holidays. They also collected hygiene items and donated them to the Lakeshore Foster Families & Friends organization which provides support to kids placed in protective custody due to neglect or abuse. Happy 2026 to all.

ZONE 5 Lt. Governor: Chuck Erickson

Appleton Noon Optimists will host its annual Golf Outing on Monday, June 1 at the Royal St. Patrick's Golf Course. Contact Club President Chuck Erickson for more information. The goal is to raise over \$15,000 to support local youth programs.



Lt. Gov. Chuck Erickson

Brillion Optimist Club will host their annual Tri Star Basketball Tournament at the Middle School Gym on Monday, March 16 at 5:00 p.m. Contact the club for more information brillionoptimistclub@gmail.com.

Chilton Club: Pat Miller installed Jenny Jacobs as the newest member of the club Dec. 17. Jenny was presented with a packet of information as well as a certificate making it official. Welcome, Jenny!

The club was treated to Christmas music from the Chilton High School Concert Choir at their last meeting of the year. The 18 students were accompanied by Adriana Hanson, choir director, and the music was beautiful and surely set the mood for Christmas.

The Light Ride for the Elderly was rescheduled for Friday, Dec. 26. Volunteers enjoyed taking the seniors around the city and fairgrounds as they viewed the Christmas lights.



The Meet and Greet Santa for Children with Special Needs, *pictures above*, is a heartwarming event that was held on Dec. 13 at the library. Although a bitterly cold day, 25 children braved the weather. That alone shows how much families value the opportunity! Children presented their wishes to Santa while pictures were taken by volunteer photographer, Denver Platt. They have many repeat children, so club members have a chance to watch them grow both physically and emotionally.

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Zone Report

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Chilton participated in the Holiday Parade of Lights with a float. A special thanks to Randy Darnell for putting the float together.

Greenleaf-Wrightstown will host its annual Youth Appreciation Awards and Dinner on Wednesday, Jan. 21 at Van Abel's of Hollandtown. Lt. Governor/Past Governor Chuck Erickson will be the guest speaker.

Sherwood Area Optimists will host its Meat Raffle on Saturday, Feb 7 at 1:30 p.m. at Jeanne's Bar & Grill.

ZONE 6 Co-Lt. Governors:

John Leonhard and Lori VanNatta



Lt. Gov. John Leonhard



Lt. Gov. Lori VanNatta

The **Fond du Lac Evening Optimist Club** completed their School Cares Project with delivery of all items to schools in mid-October. Between their grant from the Optimist International Foundation and club funds, they donated over \$4,000 worth of clothing necessities, gloves, hygiene items, and water bottles to all the public schools in the FDL School District.

This club was actively involved with the FDL Salvation Army this quarter. On Oct. 16, they donated 69 new winter coats toward the annual Coats for Kids Program. On Dec. 12, the club held their annual FDL Evening Optimist bell ringing day for the Salvation Army Red Kettle Campaign. They had 26 members ringing bells at four locations throughout Fond du Lac. They also sponsored four children in the Salvation Army Angel Tree Program to help ensure that all children have a joyous Christmas.

On Nov. 4, FDL Evening club provided and served a meal at the Holy Family Warming Shelter in Fond du Lac.

On Dec. 6, 11 members of their club participated in what has become an annual tradition. They stop by their "more experienced" members' residences and drop off a small gift after singing a couple Christmas carols.

This allows them to connect with older members who cannot make it to a lot of club functions. The club has 10 members who each have between 35 years and 70 years of Optimist membership...the true definition of "Optimist for life".

The FDL Evening Optimist made several other donations to local organizations during this quarter including the Fond du lac County Shop with a Cop Program, The Boys & Girls Club of Fond du

Lac, Envision Greater Fond du Lac's Agricultural Ambassador Program, and Guardians of the Children, a group that provides support to victims of child abuse.

On Dec. 10, the FDL Evening Optimist held their annual Christmas Party at Blanck's Supper Club in Johnsburg. They celebrated their accomplishments of the past calendar year and set the stage for a strong 2026.

Fond du Lac Noon Optimist Club: The Fond du Lac Noon Club had a busy start to the Optimist Year filled with service projects and celebrations.

In October, the club had a booth at Downtown Fond du Lac's Monster March. The Monster March is held the last Saturday in October as a part of the Farmers' Market. During the event, area youth walk up and down Main Street dressed in their Halloween costumes. There were also booths to hand out various goodies to the youngsters. The Noon Club once again had Halloween Safety books printed to give out for the event, and also had plenty of candy for the youth and the adults with them. A special thanks to Board Member Nichole Skelton who manned the booth this year.

The Fond du Lac Noon Club also held its annual Youth Appreciation Dinner. The event recognizes high school students nominated by their teachers for being good citizens in their schools and the community. Nominating teachers, the student being recognized and two adults of their choice are invited to dinner at South Hills Golf & Country Club, as well as a program where the nomination letters are read and each student receives a plaque created, produced and donated by club member Joe Skelton's company, Nemesis Metals.

Continuing its partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Fond du Lac, the Fond du Lac Noon Optimists, adopted families to gift during the Holiday Season. This year four families were adopted. The club provides funds to buy gifts for each family member, and various club members do the shopping and gift wrapping, as well as delivering the gifts to the Boys and Girls Club.



Early in December, the Fond du Lac Noon Club and guests gathered at Sunset on the Water for dinner and a program during which several members were recognized, the club's officers and board were installed, and seven new members joined the club.

North Fond du Lac Optimist Club: This time of year, the North Fond du Lac Club is involved in many local events from their 54th Annual Pancake Breakfast and Raffle, to lighting up their local Optimist Park, being involved in Wreaths Across America, and volunteering at the local Nutcracker Christmas with Santa. Also



Zone Reports

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included in the activities was having a Christmas Party for members, donating funds to the School District for heart monitors, funding their local Robotics organizations, and funding the School District's annual Adopt-A-Family program.

At the 54th Annual Optimist Pancake Breakfast and Raffle fundraiser, *pictured on right*, the club served 1,729 people. This community event included volunteers from the high school Key Club, Robotics Club, Cub Scout Troop, and NFDL Junior Cheerleading group.



For the Annual Light up the Park, club members spent three weeks and 100s of hours lighting up Optimist Park. On Nov. 28, Santa and Mrs. Claus did the ceremonial turning on the lights along with visiting with the local children, *see photo on right*. The area high school students volunteer to hand out hot cocoa. Park lights are on from 5-9 p.m. nightly until the New Year.



The club is a supporter of Wreaths Across America. Donations from the club, its members and the community totaled over \$2,000. These funds are used to purchase wreaths to be placed on the graves of local veterans in King, WI on Dec. 12.

Optimist Club of Sheboygan has been working on its strategy and goals of the future. This work is not as exciting as projects, but is important for the direction of the club. This effort centers around a "Project Priority Schedule". Using this document as a planner, club members identified the service and fundraising the club will perform annually in each Optimist quarter.

This schedule will not limit the club in its effort to meet the needs of the kids in the Sheboygan community. In other words, if a new project is presented which is not part of the schedule, the club can embrace it. This may include continual annual projects or a one-time effort.

In the category of a one-time project, the club is currently planning a "Kid's Carnival" at the newly expanded Optimist Park. This project will serve as both a community service and fundraising project. Planned for late summer 2026, the carnival will include older children's games, contests and refreshments.

More recently, club members assisted the Salvation Army with two projects. The first is the Salvation Army's annual coat drive and distribution. Club members worked together with staff to help families pick out coats and other winter clothing items for their children. Over 125 families received all their outerwear for the winter.

The second Salvation Army project was its annual bell ringing effort to benefit the many Salvation Army programs. Optimists worked in shifts throughout the day collecting money for the Salvation Army, *see photo above*.



What Do You Want to Happen to this Newsletter?

Dear Optimist Members,

As we put out new calendars and began to absorb that we are now in the year 2026, the first thought for me was, "Wow! In October I will become the WINUM governor!" The older I get, the more quickly it seems time passes. October will be here before I know it.

I have already started some of the ground work: Working on conference locations with Laurel, making lists of who to ask to be on my team; and monthly training with incoming OI president is starting soon. I've also been thinking about goals for WINUM and our theme for next year (more on these items later).

It's all really exciting, but one important thing that hasn't been taken care of is finding someone to take over this district newsletter. This is the fifth year that I have been putting it together, and frankly I love it, because newsletters have always been something I enjoy. However, when I am governor, I want to be

able to spend all of my time focusing on *being* your governor.

Although we haven't found someone yet to take over the newsletter, I am not worried because I AM AN OPTIMIST. What do you think? Do you know of someone who would like to continue this newsletter in its current format? I would certainly provide training and guidance. Or do we want a briefer version in the future? How do we even ensure that people are receiving and reading our newsletter? Do we want something different? Do podcasts work? One thing I was thinking about was sending out short monthly governor reports. Would that be sufficient?

I look forward to getting lots of feedback to this letter. You can email me or call me (contact info below). Until then, keep being optimistic and *thank you* for all that you do.

Louise Bentley, 2025-26 Governor Elect
Email winumnews22@gmail.com or call 715-379-8363

2025-26 Leadership Team

Optimist International (OI) Leadership Team

Optimist International President:

[Thomas Kendo](#)

Great Plains Regional Vice President:

[Thomas Lloyd](#)

WINUM Executive Committee

Governor: [Vanessa Rueth](#)

Governor Elect: [Louise Bentley](#)

Immediate Past Governor:

[Angie Riemer](#)

Past Governor: [Chuck Erickson](#)

District Treasurer [Mark Sprangers](#)

District Secretary: [Roni Kaczor-Smith](#)

Governor's Assistant: [Tammy Koehler](#)

Lt. Governors

Zone 1: [Deb Braden](#)

Zone 2: [Mary Sue Edens Pfantz](#)

Zone 3: [Ben Elsner](#)

Zone 4: [Roger Philippi](#)

Zone 5: [Chuck Erickson](#)

Zone 6: (Co-Lt. Governors)

[Lori VanNatta](#)

[John Leonhard](#)

Committee Chairs

Communications-External Marketing:

[Tammy Koehler](#)

Communications-Internal/Newsletter:

[Louise Bentley](#)

Conferences & Convention Chair:

[Laurel Schirmer](#)

Essay: [Shannon Dalton](#)

Finance Chair: [Tammy Koehler](#)

First timers: (Co-chairs)

[Lori VanNatta](#) and [Trina DeLasky](#)

Growth Chair: [Troy Dostal](#)

Hospitality: [John Leonhard](#)

Junior Golf Chair: [Ben Elsner](#)

Junior Optimists (JOI) Clubs:

[Bonnie Dahnke](#) and [Dawn Cherek](#)

Leadership Chair: [Jodi Arriola](#)

Membership Chair: [Ann Sheahan](#)

OI Convention Ambassador:

[Angie Riemer](#)

OI District Foundation Rep: [Troy Dostal](#)

Oratorical Chair: [Chuck Erickson](#)

Photographer: [Mary Joan O'Leary](#)

Technology: [Gary Sheahan](#)

Website Advisor: [Tammy Koehler](#)

The Optimist Creed

Promise Yourself

To be **SO STRONG** that nothing can disturb your peace of mind.

To talk **health, happiness and prosperity**
to every person you meet.

To make all your friends **feel that there is something in them.**

To look at the **sunny side of everything**
and make your optimism come true.

To **think** only of the best, to **work** only for the best and to
expect only the best.

To be just as enthusiastic about the **SUCCESS** of others
as you are about your own.

To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the
GREATER ACHIEVEMENTS of the future.

To wear a cheerful countenance **AT ALL TIMES** and give
every living creature you meet a smile.

To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have
NO TIME to criticize others.

To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear,
and **too happy** to permit the presence of trouble.



Looking for Optimist Resources?

- * Check out the [WINUM website](#).
- * Like Us on [WINUM Facebook page](#).
- * Go to the [Optimist International website](#) and click on [Member Resources](#).
- * Like the [Optimist International Facebook page](#).
- * Contact a District Leader listed on left.