



Bee the Change

ISSUE

02

February

2026

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Optimist INTERNATIONAL

Dakotas – Manitoba –
Minnesota District

What is the mission of DMM Optimists?

By providing hope and positive vision,
Optimists bring out the best in youth,
our communities and ourselves

A note from your DMM Governor...

Fellow DMM Optimist members – welcome to a COLD 2026! We are already into the 2nd quarter of the Optimist year, and I am so proud to serve all of you, as your Governor! There are amazing projects and events all over the DMM that are Bringing out the Best in youth, the communities and yourselves!

Thank you to the 44 Optimist members that have sponsored a New Member so far this Optimist Year. We have added 52 new members to this great organization, unfortunately we have lost 66 members, which puts us at a NET -14. I have hope and faith that the good news of what we do will spread, and our membership will grow. A special shoutout to Gabby Stewart, with the Sioux Valley Optimist Club in Sioux Falls, SD. She has sponsored 6 new members this Optimist year! Gabby is also the President of the club AND they are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of their club on Optimist Day: February 5th! KUDOS!

Check out the DMM incentives for clubs and the members that sponsor a NEW member! Clubs will get \$25 for each new NET member that joins the club PLUS, for the month of February, there is a "Sweetheart of a DEAL" for you. IF members sponsor two new members in the month of February, the DMM will pay out \$50.00 to the sponsor, PLUS the club will also get the \$25 if it is a NET new member, PLUS the sponsor will be put into a raffle drawing for each new member they sponsor for \$120! (1st drawing will be on March 15th)

REMINDER to Club Officers: If you get your Optimist Institute officer training completed by January 31st – your name will be entered into a drawing for \$100! GOOD LUCK!

I can't wait to see what the DMM can do in ONE MONTH with our membership! We will be sharing our optimism, promoting growth in the DMM, and choosing to BEE the change, The DMM is strengthening their communities every day. Thank you for all you do to uplift and inspire others.

Optimistically - Governor Cricket

Happy Anniversary to....

Sioux Valley Optimist Club – 50 Years
Watertown Optimist Club – 50 Years
Optimist Club of Glen Lake – 75 Years

Spreading Optimism Through Service...



February reminds us that even in the heart of winter, warmth comes from connection, kindness, and service. As Optimists, this month reflects the very values we strive to share — encouraging hope, building relationships, and making a positive difference in the lives of others, especially our youth.

This is a wonderful time to celebrate the impact of our club's efforts. Through our projects, meetings, and volunteer hours, we continue to bring optimism into our community. Every act of service, no matter how small it may seem, helps create a brighter future and reminds others that someone believes in them.

February also invites us to focus on encouragement and appreciation — thanking our fellow members, recognizing community partners, and inspiring young people to see their potential. A kind word or a helping hand can have a lasting effect, and that's the heart of Optimism.

As we move forward, let's continue to live out the Optimist Creed by looking for the good, expecting success, and giving our time and talents generously. Thank you for all you do to keep optimism alive in our community. Together, we are making a difference — one positive action at a time.

Logyn Bottemiller, Vice President of the Junior Optimist Club of Prior Lake, reported on the many fun and impactful activities completed by their 380-member JOI club—the largest JOI club in the world. This year's projects included a toy drive, food drive, serving lunch to members of the homeless community, Miracle League baseball, a Halloween Bash, December Dazzle, and much more. What could a JOI club do in your community?

Wanita Parker, President of the Saint Cloud Morning Optimist Club, shared highlights from the club's *What Do Snowmen Do at Night* event. More than 450 youth participated in activities such as storytime, building a castle, relays, parachute games, making snowflakes, taking your picture with Frosty and other fun activities. Hot dogs were served with snowman cookies and cold chocolate milk (snowmen can't have hot cocoa!). Santa arrived with a police escort, and every child received a wooden toy from TLC Toys.

Pat Thompson, President of the Minnesota Valley (Mankato) Optimist Club, described how new members have brought fresh ideas and energy to the club. These included partnerships with the school district through DECA and preschool programs, as well as a mitten-making project for Crisis Nursery/LSS. She expressed excitement about new members actively participating and chairing events.

Dee Borman, Secretary of the Brookings Optimist Club, explained the club's OWLS project, which provides prepaid Visa cards to schools to help meet individual student needs such as food, clothing, snacks, and school supplies. The club also provided a vision-screening machine and, through a partnership with the Lions Club, helped supply glasses for a student in need.

Kathy Reiser, President of the Grand Forks Optimist Club, presented information about the club's favorite project—the Easter Gift Basket Program. Each year, members assemble up to 175 baskets filled with candy, books, and other goodies for hospitals and youth-serving community organizations to distribute to families in need. Members especially enjoy assembling and delivering the baskets.

Diane Koch, President of the Saint Paul Optimist Club, shared details about the club's high school senior scholarship program. The club awards \$1,500 scholarships to seniors who have overcome hardships, as identified by school counselors. Recipients and their families are invited to a celebratory dinner honoring the students' achievements. The scholarships are funded through the club's 501(c)(3), Friends of Youth Scholarship Foundation, with support from individuals, businesses, and organizations. She also highlighted partnerships with the Jeremiah Program, which supports single mothers and their children, and the Ronald McDonald House, where the club provides meals for families with hospitalized loved ones.

Nick Johnson, President of the Rapid City Optimist Club, announced the club's new name (formerly the Rushmore Noon Optimist Club of the Black Hills). He described the club's annual Red Ribbon anti-drug program, which includes a billboard contest that received 784 entries, the distribution of more than 14,000 red ribbons to youth, and participation by 19 businesses across 43 locations. Schools also take part through classroom door decoration contests.

Optimist International Tom Kendro joined our DMM 2nd Quarter Zoom Conference

OI President Tom Kendro thanked clubs for bringing out the best in our youth, our communities and ourselves! OPTIMISM does make a difference. He asked members to help make the DMM District and Optimist International stronger by increased GROWTH, RETENTION, ENGAGEMENT. He invited everyone to "BEE the Change" (his theme for this year). He invited all members to "each one, invite one." Invite a friend to a club activity and then ASK the friend to join your club.

Essay Contest

Hello to All

The Essay contest is just getting started with the participating clubs, please check with your local clubs to get their dates.

I will need ALL the Club winner's information emailed to me no later than February 28, 2026. Please be sure to have all the required information in order for the club winner to be eligible to participate in the District Level Contest, the Club Chair must submit the following:

- District Essay Contest Entry Form
- Essay in a digital Microsoft Word, no PDF's
- Must have number of students that participated in the contest
- Must have appropriate signatures 2025-2026 Application Optimist International Essay Contest (both pages)
- Age/ID verification by Contest Chair
- Only District winner will need copies of ID included.

For questions please contact Bruce Balfanz, 612-709-6628 or email babalfanz@msn.com



Visual Arts Contest

There are two age divisions: A) Age up to 7 years B) Age 8-11 years (must be age eleven or lower as of October 1, 2025). Children create artwork using pen, colors, markers, etc. The topic this year is **Be Bold - Be The Change**. The artwork is sent to an address and by a date determined by the club chair. Club members may be involved with the judging of the artwork creating a fun and exciting meeting. At a future meeting bring the children and their parents to see all of the artwork submitted and award prizes. Be prepared to see lots of smiles. Briefly mention the events your club does and invite the parent to help, if they are interested. The actual, physical artwork of the Club winner must be submitted to OI no later than **March 1, 2026**. There still is time to get your Club involved. If you have questions, please reach out to Susan Fix, 507-276-2356 or email fixks@newulmtel.net



Oratorical Contest

"The Moment I Realized I Belonged – My Definition of Community"

All entry requirements must be submitted to the DMM Oratorical Chair via email by the deadline for consideration. The details are:

Deadline: **Friday, April 17, 2026** (extensions must be prearranged)

Zone/Regional Contests: Dates determined by DMM Oratorical Chair if required based on number of club participants.

District Contest: **May 1st, 2026**. Winner submissions due to Optimist International by the DMM Oratorical Chair by **May 16th, 2026**.

Contest Entry Requirements: Club Contest Coordinators or Chairs should submit by the deadline for club qualifying District Contestants. Please send via email, with the subject line DMM Oratorical Entry - Your Club Name. Please attach all required materials in an email or drive (.zip, Google, Dropbox) and ensure all attachments are clearly labeled by file name.

Copy of Contest Application

Copy of District Entry Form

Copy of Speech (Important: MS Word, please no PDF)

Statement of Age Verification performed by Club Contest Chair

NOTE: District Winner will need to be able to provide copy of ID for Age Verification, State/Province ID, Birth Certificate or Passport

If you have questions, please contact Linnea Solem at linneasolem@comcast.net

Or visit the website at <https://www.optimist-dmm.org/oratorical-contests>



Celebrate Optimist Day

Thursday, February 5, 2026

Optimist Day originated from early 20th-century efforts by the Optimist Club of America to promote positive thinking and counteract April Fool's Day, with roots tracing back to 1909.

It was formalized in 2013 by Optimist International to recognize community volunteers and youth, now observed annually on the first Thursday of February.

Key details regarding the origin and evolution of Optimist Day include:

Initial Concept (1909):

The Optimist Club of America promoted an "Optimist Day" on April 1 to replace practical jokes with kind acts.

Formalization:

(2013): Sylvain Levesque, a member of the Loretteville Optimist Club and the Quebec National Assembly, proposed a resolution to establish a specific date, which was adopted by Optimist International.

Chosen Date:

The first Thursday in February was selected to align with the start of the work session at the National Assembly.

Purpose :

The day focuses on fostering optimism, recognizing the achievements of youth, and honoring the volunteers who support them in their communities.

While the first official "International Optimist Day" was set in 2013, various clubs had held similar events for decades prior to that, including an "Optimists in Action Day" in 1993.

Happy Optimist Day!

DMM Communication Contest for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCDHH)

The contest will be at the Metro School for the Deaf in St. Paul on April 25 or May 9. We had 4 contestants last year. Application deadline is March 13. Contact Jeri Gorman for more information.

DMM Childhood Health & Wellness

Dee Skjold, Wellness chairperson reported that there are two grant deadlines for applications for matching grants (up to \$1,000). Deadlines are January 31 and August 31. More information is on our DMM Website.

OI Presidential Incentive Club Recognition Program 2025-2026

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 \$100.00
- 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 members or
 - Charter one or more new Clubs



So Proud of our Clubs & Members – Congratulations!



New Member Sponsors for this Year

Gabby Stewart of Sioux Falls Sioux Valley Club – sponsored 6 new members
JoAnne Pelzer of South Winnipeg Club – sponsored 2 new members
Larry Pelzer of South Winnipeg Club – sponsored 2 new members
Sally Damm Norby of Brookings Club - sponsored 2 new members
Greg Honl of Hartford Area Optimist Club – sponsored 2 new members
Wanita Parker of Saint Cloud Morning Club - sponsored 2 new members

Let's Get Vet's \$25 New Member Incentive

Minot Optimist club

Third Quarter Reimbursed Registrations (QUALIFIERS SO FAR)

Qualified by attending First Quarter meeting and sponsoring a new member

Cindy Bode – New Ulm Club
Sally Damm Norby – Brookings Club
Terry Gorman – Saint Paul and Roseville Clubs
Mark Kline – Rushmore Club
Jack Parker – Saint Cloud Morning Club
Wanita Parker- Saint Cloud Morning Club
Dottie Seamans – Saint Cloud Morning Club
Kathy Reiser – Grand Forks Club
Larry Pelzer – South Winnipeg Club

Deadlines for other DMM Incentives

\$50 drawing for Club officers that complete Optimist Institute training by January 31
\$120 drawing for sponsoring a new member from October 1 to March 15
\$50 drawing for Bee the Change Award by March 15
February 28 deadline for SWEETHEART INCENTIVE – sponsor 2 members in February (See flyer attached)
Get New (NET) Members Club Incentive (\$25 per net new member)

Bee the Change!



DMM 2025-2026 Growth & Incentive Awards



SHARE YOUR OPTIMISM

DMM PROMOTE GROWTH INCENTIVES:

DMM Attend & Recruit:

Any member that attends the 1st Quarter Conference AND then recruits a new member before March 15, 2026, will receive a FREE conference registration for the third Quarter!

DMM Get New Members:

Clubs will receive \$25 for each NET NEW MEMBER above their October 1 membership count.

Cash awards will be paid at the end of each quarter based on the Optimist International Scoreboard membership reports.

Two DMM Sponsor-a-Member Raffles:

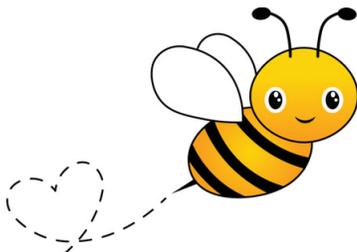
Earn one entry into a DMM drawing for each new club member that you sponsor from October 1 to March 15 and one additional entry for sponsoring a new member between March 16 to September 15, 2026. (One cash prize of \$120 for each drawing)

DMM Let's Get Vets! *(Completed)*

Beginning November 1 through December 31, (in honor of Veterans Day), let's ask our current and retired service men and women to join your great organization. Clubs will receive \$25 for every new Veteran member they recruit during November and December.

DMM Website: www.optimist-dmm.org

DMM Facebook: DMM District Optimist Members



CLUB MEMBER

"BEE THE CHANGE" AWARDS

Bringing out the Best in Youth

1. Participated in at least one club youth program
2. Sponsored at least one new member
3. Donated to the OIF or CCOF Dime-A-Day (\$36.50)
4. Demonstrates OPTIMISM in their daily life.
5. Written nomination by the Club President for a member that has excelled in the above items

Bringing out the Best in Themselves

1. Participating in and completion of two levels of the Optimist Institute Professional Development Program (PDP)
2. Sponsoring at least one new member
3. Donating to the OIF or CCOF Dime-A-Day (\$36.50)
4. Demonstrates OPTIMISM in their daily life.
5. Written nomination by the Club President for a member that has excelled in the above items

Bringing out the Best in their Community

1. Participating in at least one club community program/event
2. Sponsoring at least one new member
3. Donating to the OIF or CCOF Dime-A-Day (\$36.50)
4. Demonstrates OPTIMISM in their daily life.
5. Written nomination by the Club President for a member that has excelled in the above items

* All nominees will receive a certificate of recognition

* Nominate by emailing Governor Cricket: Nominees contact information & description of participation

*** One nominee in each category will receive \$50 cash award**

*** Nominations due: 31 March & 15 September**

DMM Website: www.optimist-dmm.org

DMM Facebook: DMM District Optimist Members



SWEETHEART OF A DEAL

(Month of FEBRUARY)



Sponsor TWO new members = Sweetheart of a D&AL

DMM GROWTH is in the Air!

SPONSOR TWO MEMBERS GROW Optimism! SHARE the Love!

WHO IS YOUR ??Sweetheart?? ANYONE who wants to be More OPTIMISTIC!

The SWEET Details:

Sponsor TWO new members: earn Sweetheart Incentive
DMM will reimburse \$50.00 to the sponsor!

(BONUS: Club may also get \$25 each new NET member - GET NEW Member incentive)

Limited time Valentines Day offer ~ month of February



Governor Cricket Sweetheart Incentive

SHARE the Love. SPREAD Optimism

Because the best things in life are even better when shared!

Details....

DMM Professional Development Chairperson Cheryl Bergstrom wants everyone to know that the Professional Growth Institute (PGI) and Professional Development Program (PDP) are now on the Optimist Institute Website. These personal growth programs are all FREE opportunities for our Optimist members.

Optimist International President Tom Kendo indicated that the new GROUPER program will be available to all members – The program will no longer provide a \$100 payment to Optimist members but will provide free incentives for healthy activities for members. More information will be sent to members by Optimist International.

Carmen Bakken – DMM Governor -Elect wants you to know that May 1 & 2 is the 3rd Quarter Conference in Watertown, SD. Hotel room reservation deadline is April 1. Registration fees include a Friday evening Pizza Party after the Oratorical Contest, plus breakfast and lunch on Saturday.

Governor Kristi (Cricket) Palmer encourages all club Presidents to submit a nominee for the DMM BEE the Change Member Awards – Deadline for application is March 31.

Heather Myers, an OI Institute staff person wants you to know that there is a new technology development series including Excel and PowerPoint on the Optimist OI Institute website. The OI Institute Media library includes all the OI Leadership Development webinars and all the keynote speakers of our Optimist International Conventions.

Upcoming Events

Third Quarter DMM Conference: May 1-2, 2026
Watertown, SD.
(Registration form attached to this newsletter)

Fourth Quarter Convention: August 21-22, 2026
Rapid City, SD

Optimist International Convention: June 28–July 2, 2026
Jacksonville, FL

Good To Know



DMM 3rd QUARTER DISTRICT MEETING

May 1 & 2, 2026

Optimist Member and Guest Registration Information

Ramkota Hotel/Watertown Event Center
1901 9th Ave SW, Watertown, SD 57201
605-886-8011 (call Hotel Direct)
Rooms only \$109.99 per night + tax
(ask for DMM Optimist Room Block)
Reserve your Room by April 1, 2026

_____ \$80 (US Funds) Early Bird All Inclusive
Registration & Payment
Postmarked by March 31, 2026

_____ \$85 (US Funds) District All Inclusive
Registration & Payment
Postmarked after April 1, 2026

Registration fee includes:
Friday: Pizza Party
Saturday: Buffet Breakfast and Lunch

HOSTED BY THE OPTIMIST CLUB OF WATERTOWN, SOUTH DAKOTA

Make Checks Payable to: DMM

Mail Registration Forms and Payment to: Carmen Bakken
PO Box 1632
Watertown, South Dakota 57201

Questions? Please contact:
Carmen Bakken at 605-881-1348 carmenbakkendmm@gmail.com

Registration Information (one Member or Guest per registration form, please)

Name: _____ Club Name _____ Club Number 35- _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State/Province: _____ Zip: _____

Dietary or Physical Needs: _____ Optimist Member or Guest? _____

Evening Phone: (____) _____ Email: _____

Current Club Position: _____

Current District or International Position: _____

- This is my first Attendance at a DMM District Meeting.
- Yes, I'm interested in attending the Dutch Treat Dinner Saturday evening (off-site, location to be determined)

Please return to Carmen Bakken, PO Box 1632, Watertown, SD 57201 before March 31, 2026