

# The Spark

## “Igniting the Power of Optimism”



During this Optimist year of 2025-26, there are a number of challenges and opportunities for our clubs and members to work through. I want to share with you what our direction is and why we are going to target club and district events with new actions.

**Our theme for this year is “Igniting the Power of Optimism”.** Why did we choose this statement? Because it is important that we rekindle the enthusiasm for being Optimists. We have a very good core of clubs with many fine youth and community activities. However, as the age and number of our members change we find it harder to keep these programs going at the high level that we have been used to achieving.

### What do we need to do change this trend?

Look to gain new members, which will bring increased enthusiasm and ideas to help maintain and grow current activities and add potentially others where applicable. We realize that each club’s area and membership has different key activities, we are not trying to have all clubs share the same events. We just want your events to be vibrant and address the needs of your communities.

To help achieve this, we had **Keith Bailey, Co-Founder of Articulated-Intelligence**, conduct an information and role playing presentation on Networking at our First Quarter Conference on November 8, 2025. Take sometime at your upcoming club meetings to discuss the information from Keith and put it into action.

We also will be testing a **Facebook ad program** to help determine if it can assist in building new clubs or adding members for current clubs at the beginning of 2026. We are following up on this program which originated in Ontario, Canada. I want to thank **Bill Ashbee** who is the Growth Chair and his committee for their efforts on this task.

**What can we do to help increase the Optimist District and Club brand recognition?**  
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### District Officers

- ☐ Governor— Gary Banninga, Windsor OC
- ☐ Governor— Elect — Bob Hamblin, Windsor Gardens OC
- ☐ Secretary:
- ☐ Treasurer: Laura Mitchell, DTC Optimist Club
- ☐ Immediate Past Gov: Bill Ashbee, Boulder Luncheon OC

### Lt. Governors

- ☐ Zone 1: Cameron Banninga, Windsor
- ☐ Zone 2: Earleen Oswalt, Ft Morgan Sunrise OC
- ☐ Zone 3: open
- ☐ Zone 4: open
- ☐ Zone 5: Bonnie West, Tamarac OC
- ☐ Zone 6: Linda Williams, Tamarac OC
- ☐ Zone 7: Tom Mehl, Gateway, OC

### Important Websites

**Optimist International:**  
[www.optimist.org](http://www.optimist.org)

**OI Foundation:** [oifoundation.org/](http://oifoundation.org/)

**CO/WY District:**  
[www.optimistcowy.org/](http://www.optimistcowy.org/)

**CO/WY Brain Bowl:**  
[www.optimistbrainbowl.org/](http://www.optimistbrainbowl.org/)

**Continue from page 1.....** Too often I hear from club members that have been in existence for many years, the public in their community does not know who conducts the Easter Egg Hunt, the Fishing Derby, the reading programs at the elementary/library locations and so on.

**We will be utilizing Optimist District banners at key club and district activities.** A QR code on the banner can take an individual to our district website. They can search about upcoming events, local club locations or perhaps being a new member, a sponsor, volunteer or a participant at an activity.

In addition we plan to work with various media resources to help broaden the awareness of our Optimist District and Clubs. We realize that a number of media types charge significant fees to place ads, or place articles. However we are putting together some suggestions on no or low cost options to generate increased visibility and awareness of our clubs and the district as well. More to come on this in the near future.

**What can you and your club do to help with these actions?**

**We need you and your club to hold NOW and WOW type events** to help look for new members, sponsors, and volunteers. Have your members work on the networking items that Keith Bailey presented (each club president received a copy) via email from Bob Hamblin, Linda Williams and myself during mid-November. These skills will help you be more effective and comfortable **Now is the time to “Be the Change” as Optimist International President Tom Kendo says often.** But in the COWY District we want to take it one step further by;

**“Igniting the Power of Optimism”**

**Gary Banninga, Governor, COWY District 25, 970 673-6010**



**A volunteer experience that is  
as much fun as it is rewarding!**



**OPTIMIST BRAIN BOWL      Sign up to volunteer!**

**January 24, 2026 Central/South Qualifier Tournament - Heritage HS in Littleton**

**February 7, 2026 North Qualifier Tournament - Hinkley HS in Aurora**

**February 21, 2026 Championship Tournament – Thomas Jefferson HS in Denver**

# First Quarter Conference *“Igniting the Power of Optimism”*

## *“The Spark”* Learning, Food and Fun Gary Banninga, Gov

The 1st Quarter Conference of the 2025-26 District 25 year, was held on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at the Assistance League of Denver. We had 55 registrants exceeding our target budget plan. The business meeting (Board of Directors) was held in the main room for all of those arriving by 8:00 am.

We wanted to share the results of many activities from the 2024-25 year as well as the goals for each of these groups for this year. **Many thanks to Laura Mitchell for her review of the Brain Bowl competition, Jeff Gartz for the Essay contest, Bob Meyer on Jr Golf, Steve Gorrell on the Oratorical event, Optimist Foundation Linda Hamblin, Southwest Region VP Terri Kearney, OI 2026 Convention Lisa Banninga, Linda Williams Leadership Development, Bill Ashbee on Growth and especially Abigail Nicholas our esteemed MC.**

Two videos helped highlight the morning session, first **OI President Tom Kendo's** speech for the 2025-26 year (**Be the Change**) and the **Southwest Region Oratorical winner (Rhoen Nevins)** from the **Optimist Club of Windsor**.

### LEARNING

In the morning session we had over an hour presentation from **Keith Bailey, Co-Founder of Articulated-Intelligence** a local Denver business targeting improving business personnel's communication and networking skills. The information and role playing pieces were wonderful as well as his presentation style. In our survey of the events his presentation topped the list.



After a short break we had a 20 minute table discussion on what Keith presented. This helped generate more ideas on how to use the information in their own clubs and communities.

**In mid-November an email from Bob Hamblin, Linda Williams and myself sent out to all club presidents with Keith's overview of his presentation. *Since then, we have received a number of positive meetings between our club members and new contacts. I encourage you to work on using the new tools to help be more confident and comfortable in your discussions, as we look to increase our new members, sponsors and volunteers.***

Our afternoon presentation featured four of our clubs providing their key events and fundraisers. What a wonderful breadth of activities. **Thanks to George Buzick from Monaco South, Debra Fry and Beth Hewlett from Tamarac, Linda Williams for Littleton and Sheila Woolfolk from Gateway.** We especially appreciate Linda and Sheila who had to fill in at the last moment due to the illness of the original presenters.

**FOOD** - Thanks to **Lisa Banninga, April Bodendorfer and BJ Burleigh** for preparing and serving a great breakfast and wonderful lunch! Home made breads for part of our breakfast, two great soups, terrific salad and more. Despite their last names, they are the A-team.

**Continued next page...**

## Conference continued....

### FUN

Of course we had fun, woven through the day. Thanks to Keith Bailey for including some great laughs. **In the am, we had a 12 question District Trivia contest.** Special thanks to Abigail for hosting this. Those that correctly answered the questions received a big Payday (candy bar).

In the pm, we held our **Bunny Hop Race.** The table with **George Buzick, Wade Hammond and Bob Meyer (ace Bunny Guide) won the championship.** They each received a \$1,000,000, (candy bar).



### THANKS

We would like to thank **Michael Powers** who put every presenter's package in the correct place to ensure it all ran perfectly.

To everyone who helped set up and clean up our event site.

All of the people that assisted with review of the materials, suggestions, and worked to press those that were to present to get the details into Michael Powers.

**Linda Williams** did a great job in reviewing the surveys and giving an update to share (details sent to all presidents in mid-November).

**Bob Hamblin** for taking notes at the business meeting



### FINAL COMMENTS

We received many positive comments about the conference, content and being motivated. Thanks for all of those and for being a great audience.

**As a reminder we will not be holding a Second Quarter Conference. Instead we are looking at one or two Super Zone meetings.**

*"Igniting the Power of Optimism"*



## District Oratorical 2026 Steve Gorrell District Chair

The Oratorical Contest is open to students who have not reached the age of 19 before October 1, 2025, and are not enrolled as a degree seeking student of a post-secondary institution or have not won the OI Regional Contest in St Louis.

**This year's topic is: "The Moment I Realized I Belonged--My Definition of Community"**

**Clubs will send their 1st and 2nd place winners to the Regional Contest. The Regional Contests will be held via Zoom on April 11, 2026.**



**1st , 2nd and 3rd place Regional winners will then go to the District Finals being held on April 25,2026 at Family Resource Pavilion, 9700 E Easter Ln, Centennial, CO 80112 at the 3rd Quarter Conference.** The District's 1st place winner will receive a \$2,500 scholarship and then will be able to go to the Regional/World Championships Contest at St Louis University in St Louis, MO. Where the possibility to win up to additional \$20,000 in scholarships. 2nd place District winner will receive a \$1,500 scholarship and 3rd place District winner will receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

**Last year's District Winner-Rhoen Nevins** sponsored by the Optimist Club of Windsor, won the Southwest Regional Contest in St Louis and won a \$5,000 dollar scholarship. He did not place in the top 3 of the World Contest. Rhoen Nevins was the 2nd Colorado-Wyoming District entry in the World Contest to win the Southwest Regional contest!

**The Club contest must be completed on or before March 25,2026.** Clubs must submit ALL Oratorical paperwork, with Club's check made out to the Colorado-Wyoming District in the amount of \$20.00 per contestant to: Steve Gorrell. 14734 Vine Street, Thornton, CO 80602 by April 1, 2026 for the Regional Contest

All contestants must speak on the official topic in the first sentence of the speech. Timing will begin with the first spoken word. You can go to [www.optimist.org](http://www.optimist.org). Programs-scholarship contests-oratorical contest. From there you can download the rules and application for the contest.

**You may hold your Club's contest in person or via Zoom.**

Schools are in session so now is the time to contact your local schools to get them involved in the Oratorical Contest!

If you have any questions, contact your Lt Governor, Kris Gresl (414-915-2236), or me (720-308-1982)

Steve Gorrell, Colorado-Wyoming District Oratorical Chairperson, [Sgorrell1@yahoo.com](mailto:Sgorrell1@yahoo.com)

## Optimist Jr Golf Bob Meyer

The Junior Golf season is over for 2025. We're now making plans for the 2026 Junior Golf season. We haven't received notice of how many slots we'll have **THE 2026 OPTIMIST**, but we're expecting more than the 49 we received for 2025, because we had more junior golfers at our 2025 District Qualifiers than did for the 2024 District Qualifiers.



I'll be meeting with Colorado Section of the PGA Junior Golf staff on Wednesday, December 3 to discuss dates and locations for the 2026 District Qualifiers.

Optimist International Junior Golf HQ in St Louis has opened up applications for the **2026 Hugh Cranford All-Scholastic Team**. <https://optimist.org/golf/golf-allscholastic.cfm> is the link for information about the process for 2026. Attached to this article are application forms for the two different scholarships: Community Service Involvement and the All-Scholastic.

In March 2026, we will have our **Junior Golf booth at the Colorado Golf Expo**, which will be held at the National Western Center. More information about the 2026 Colorado Golf Expo is available at <https://coloradogolfexpo.com/> We're beginning our fund-raising activities for the 2026 Junior Golf season. We provide a minimum of \$500 financial assistance to all of the junior golfers who will be attending **THE 2026 OPTIMIST** at Trump Doral National Resort in Miami FL between July 15 and July 30, 2026.

Those fund-raising activities include hole and junior golf sponsorships, a golf scramble, and an online auction. More information about those fund-raising activities will be available after the first of the year.

Hole/junior golf sponsorship opportunities are discussed in the Sponsorship Opportunities flyer also attached to this article.

The CO/WY District Optimist Junior Golf program is totally self-funded. In 2025, we raised over \$45,000 to send our junior golfers to **THE 2025 OPTIMIST**. Expecting more slots for **THE 2026 OPTIMIST** means we will need to raise about \$ 50,000 in 2026.

**Please continue to support our fund-raising activities. If you'd like to get a speaker to discuss the CO/WY District Optimist Junior Golf Program, please let me know.**

Thank you, Bob Meyer  
WY District Optimist Junior Golf Co-chairman

CO/

## TIS THE SEASON FOR OWLS KiKi McGough

Schools and communities are busy preparing for winter and the holidays, so it is the perfect time for clubs to be supporting schools in the 4 tiered system of **OWLS – Optimists Working for Learner Support**.

- Perhaps you could join PTA and helping with their fundraising (**Tier 1**).
- Food banks are in desperate need of nonperishables, and many schools have food pantries and weekend backpacks. Children need coats, mittens, socks and hats for the cold weather - - we are finally getting (**Tier 2**).
- With a focus on student success, reading and math buddies are a great way to help as is recognizing positive student behavior (**Tier 3**).
- And the Optimist programs are a great way to involve the school and support student success – Essay and Oratorical, our successful Brain Bowl or Lego Robotics Clubs. And at the top is forming a Junior Optimist Club at the school. (**Tier 4**)

I recently had the opportunity to participate in two schoolwide activities as part of OWLS and our JOI Club. **Westminster-Broomfield supports the JOI Club at Hidden Lake High School in Westminster.** The club is responsible for organizing many activities and recently created the posters for a food drive for their families and for a local food bank. They also organized a Thanksgiving dinner for all staff and students, setting up, serving and doing all clean up. It gave me a chance to meet with the principal who is supporting the essay and oratorical contest. We will have prizes for the top three and will recognize the students at the school board and at city council.

**Lake Arbor Purpose Driven Optimist Club (LAPD) is working with schools in the Arvada articulation area** which includes four elementary schools, a middle and high school. At a community networking event, each school identified how they would like to work with the club. **Lawrence is a school with a high free and reduced lunch, very diverse community.** They hosted their annual Culture Festival where each classroom adopted a country with displays, food, music and art. I worked in the Mexico room and was amazed at the display created by a parent. I was able to tour the rooms, talk to a member of city council and plan future events with the principal and community liaison. **I would love to hear what other folks are doing and I would love to meet with any club to hear about how they are getting more involved with OWLS.**



Above & below, JOI at Hidden Lake



Above & Below: Lawrence ES in Jeffco



## The Bright Side of Wheat Ridge! April Bodendorfer

Welcome to the **bright** side of Wheat Ridge! The Optimist Club of Wheat Ridge is on a joyful mission to bring out the best in kids, our community and each other.

We proudly honor the memories of **Gale Schrag, Dr. Ron Mahoney and Stu Lovelace**, whose generosity and optimism continue to guide our work.

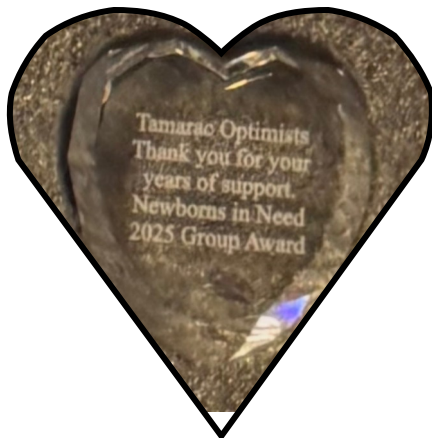
Our current focus is our annual **Christmas Project**, where we provide gifts and gift cards to **over 200 children** who might otherwise go without a Christmas. It's one of our favorite ways to spread cheer - and a tradition that keeps the spirit of optimism shining bright.

We are proud to be a part of our community of do-gooders and day-brighteners!



## Tamarac Volunteering Honored Linda Williams

On November 11, 2025 **Tamarac Optimist Club** received the **Group Honor for five years' service to Newborns in Need at Denver Health Hospital**. In those five years we have packed bags of necessities for newborns, inventoried items, restocked shelves, and contributed knitted items for the babies.



We received the award at a celebration gala for donors and volunteers at the Upper Larimer Event Center. **Loretta Blessinger, Nancy Wright, Debra Fry and Linda Williams** attended the afternoon event.

**Sharon Mushkin**, the Program Coordinator, also announced that the **Newborns in Need** name is changing to **Hello, Little One**. At the end of the ceremonies, all participants were asked to put together a bag of

necessities for a newborn, similar to the tasks the Tamarac ladies have done for five years. Pictured to the right is Tamarac's Co-President, **Deb Fry** filling a bag for a lucky 'little one'.



## Gateway OC "Thank you for your Service!" Sheila Woolfolk

Among the many local Veterans' Day activities veterans from the Gateway Optimist Club attended two events sponsored by two of our partner schools in Aurora.

### Prairie Middle School Veterans' Day Celebration –

**Air Force Veteran Bob Krech** summarized the event by the large gift bag presented by school staff to veterans and their guests with a thank you card signed by the students along with a handmade coffee cup and a handmade placemat. Many students were in attendance during the celebration including the school band that played multiple patriotic music as each veteran was recognized. The tasty breakfast meal was enjoyed by all. Lastly, per Bob, "Thank you to everyone who made this a very memorable day."

### Mission Viejo Elementary School Veterans' Day Celebration –

As captured by **Army Veteran Bob Reichardt**, Parading with 47 other veterans down school hallways filled with students wearing their patriotic hats, giving fist bumps and saying "Thank you for your Service" was really cool to say the least. The highlight of the event was when all of us were in the gymnasium and we said the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag then the student choir sang. I know this made me, and all the Veterans feel appreciated and honored.



**Note:** In 2017, Mission Viejo received designation as a Purple Heart School by the Military Order of the Purple Heart for having "great admiration, gratitude and respect for the men and women of the Armed Forces of the United States of America," according to a proclamation from the organization's Local Chapter MOPH375. The designation honors schools that provide exceptional support for veterans and their families.

## Do it For the Kids! By Linda Hamblin District Foundation Representative.

Someone once said, "If you want to discover the true heart of a man, observe the love he has for the one who cannot bring benefit back to him".

Friends, nobody else in this world can live the life that you live. Nobody else in this world has been blessed with the exact gifts you have been given. And nobody else in this world can use those gifts exactly the way you can.

Every single day YOU have the opportunity to fill someone's life with just a little more brightness. A little more promise. A little more hope.

If you can perform even one simple act of kindness for another person, or speak some encouraging words, and yes, help them financially through your gift to the OI Foundation, you just might make all the difference in the world to them in ways you will never know.

But THEY will know. And you will be blessed always by their gratitude.

You will most likely never be repaid the gift you made to the OI Foundation. No, not in dollars and cents. But I believe in my heart that you will have made a lasting difference in the lives of the ones who cannot bring benefit back to you.

Donating to the Foundation has never been easier! Simply go to [www.oifoundation.org](http://www.oifoundation.org) and click on the "Donate Now" tab. Select "US and Canada." Fill in the contact information and the amount of your gift.

Do it for the kids. Do it for your community. Do it for yourself. Thanks, my Friends!

