

The Spark



“Igniting the Power of Optimism”

Colorado – Wyoming Optimist District 2025-26 Highlights

This year passed so quickly that it was hard to believe. There have been a number of activities during the 2025-26 Optimist year that are worth mentioning as well as thanking those Individuals for their contributions.

Last fall at our **First Quarter Conference, (11/8/25) Keith Bailey** presented tools to improve communication skills for us to be more confident and comfortable as we relate with friends, new acquaintances, discuss with potential new club members or others. It was dynamic and beneficial per a number of club presidents and others that attended. Thank you to **Tom Mehl and Sheila Woolfolk from our Gateway club.**

The District had two large banners created to use at both club and District events to generate awareness about our Optimist activities. We displayed banners at the Monaco South Christmas Tree Lot (**Tom Kramis & George Buzick**), three Brain Bowl competitions (**Laura Mitchell**), Rocky Mt Train Exposition (**Frank Middleton**), three Jr Golf Qualifiers (**Bob Meyer**) and more. Well over 1,000 people were exposed to the banners!

Oratorical Contest, the District Finals were held at our Third Quarter Conference on 4/25/26. Our winner went on to the South West Region competition in St. Louis and won that competition for the third year in a row. What a great accomplishment. **Thanks Steve Gorrell.**

Essay Contest, we had 57 submissions for consideration this year. Our first place winner took the \$2500 prize supplied by the OI Foundation and our District supplied the 2nd place winner of \$1500. Thanks **Jeff Gartz.**

Brain Bowl, in our two regional and championship event over 600 students in our District competed. **Continued on page 2**

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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

OI Foundation: oifoundation.org/

CO/WY District:
www.optimistcowy.org/

CO/WY Brain Bowl:
www.optimistbrainbowl.org/

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We had well over 300 volunteers, both club members and others Thanks to all of the volunteers, coaches and parents. Thank you **Laura Mitchell** for heading up this exciting program.

President **Tom Kendo and First Lady Jennifer**, visited us to honor Monaco South’s 50th Anniversary as an Optimist Club. What a highlight, all thanks to **George Buzick**.

There are so many great club activities this year, while I can’t mention all, here are some of my favorites;

- **Optimist Club of Cheyenne**, held a fundraiser, great venue, we had a number of members attend, music, great auction items and fun. Thanks **Kathy Vetter and Linda Chasson**.
- **Tamarac Trivia Night**, wonderful competition with tables from many clubs to compete in Jeopardy type contest. Thanks to **Beth Hewlett and Debra Fry**. Winning Table had an un-named professional help out. What a fun evening.
- **Mad Hatters Tea Party, Windsor Gardens** hosted late in January, a tea party to be a fundraiser as well as looking for potential new members. Over 100 people attended. Thanks **Mary Grace Wake and Laura Wells**.
- **Chick Clark Annual Fishing Contest**, our **Longmont club** has supported this for over 20 years. What an educational event for the youth. The Longmont club provides hot dogs, chips, and drinks. Thanks to **Darrell Beck and Kathy Glenn**.
- **The Autism Backpack supported by Wheat Ridge** was a hit at the OI Convention. We displayed the pack and marketing information. Out of 11 club projects our club finished 2nd in popularity. Thanks **Bill Cassel**.

I want to thank the following people for significant contributions to the District or club activities: **Connie Ackerman, Bill Ashbee, Cameron Banninga, Lisa Banninga, George Buzick, Bill Casel, Barb Dank, Nancy DeNiro, Jeff Gartz, Steve Gorrell, Linda Hamblin, Beth Hewlett, Kiki McGough, Tom Mehl, Laura Mitchell, Abigail Nicholas, Earleen Oswalt, Michael Powers, Jeanette Thompson, Mary Grace Wake, Bonnie West and Linda Williams**.

My personal thanks to **Terri Kearney, our Southwest Regional Vice President**.

My sincerest appreciation to **Bob Hamblin, who served as an excellent Governor-Elect**. He has worked tirelessly to help our District to be stronger and come closer to maintaining a level membership volume in the years to come. My best wishes to Bob and his team for a successful 2026-27.

“Igniting the Power of Optimism” **Gary Banninga, Governor 2025-26**

COLORADO – WYOMING 78TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

The 78th Annual Colorado – Wyoming Convention was held on August 14th & 15th at Mile Hi Church in Lakewood, Colorado.

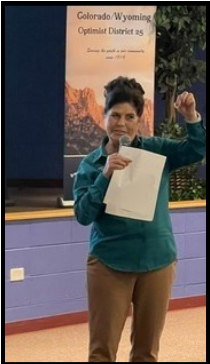
Friday afternoon the 14th, was spent on training for Presidents and Lt. Governors. Thanks to **Sue Morgan** for conducting the Presidents portion, while **Bob Hamblin** was leading the Lt. Governors. Discussions with participants stated that they believed that the training was very beneficial.



Saturday morning (8/15/2026) started with a Board of Directors Meeting led by **Gov Gary** (pictured left) followed by Breakfast and the opening of our Convention.

Two changes to the District Policies were presented and were approved unanimously.

Larry Pulaski, (pictured right) was voted to be the Governor-Elect. Congratulations!



Southwest Region Vice President, Terri Kearney, (far left) installed new officers for the 2026-27 Optimist year.

We had four discussion tables with the following topics: **A.I.**,

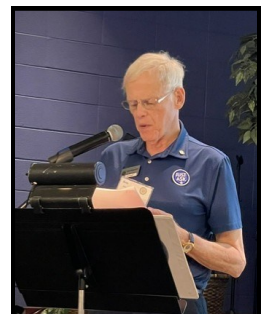
Strategic Communications for Optimist Impact, “Let Them”, Framework for Living Optimistically, and What a Volunteer Wants. We had positive comments about all four topics. Three of these were new subjects also presented at the OI Convention in Jacksonville, Florida, in late June.

We took a break before lunch and attendees were able to visit a Car Show and Farmers Market in the parking lot. It was a fun break and gave the individuals time to stretch their legs and/or take time to share comments about the Discussion Table topics.

When everyone returned, lunch was set up. The theme was a “Picnic” with a delicious picnic menu. The afternoon was filled with **Recognitions, Memorials, and Reports from our District Foundation Representative and District Ambassador.** We closed with speeches from our **Governor-Elect Larry, Governor Designate Bob, and Governor Gary.**

Thanks to all who attended, we had time to gain information from the training and discussion tables, good food and social exchanges.

Lisa Banninga, Conference/Convention Chair





108th Annual Optimist International Convention - June 28-July 1, 2026

The 108th Optimist International Convention was held in Jacksonville, Florida. The event site was the Hyatt Regency Hotel. The hotel was located on the St. Johns River which flows through this city. What a wonderful view of the river and local area.

The opening ceremony featured two youth groups. A jazz quartet from local Douglas Anderson Performing Arts High School. What a great musical set. Thanks to Governor Gary who arranged the Jazz group's participation. A local dance group, the Duval Stars also performed.



President **Tom Kendo's** theme was "Be The Change". We had bees buzzing around the General Session to help generate enthusiasm, skits and lots of fun exchanges between Tom Kendo and announcer Jim Boyd. Messages of Bee Grateful, Bee Kind, Bee an Optimist and Bee the Change set the tone for each day.

We had two Service activities tied in with a local food bank. First, due to donations by individuals on their registrations we were able to donate 120 Celebration Cake kits. Second we received a number of spices to also donate to the same food bank.

Each day of the Convention attendees could purchase a lunch in two of the conference rooms near the main ballrooms for the General Sessions. It was a big hit, with at least three different choices for lunch. It allowed people to gather and discuss actions of the convention as well as other activities in each of our Districts. Great food at a reasonable price.

Our **keynote speakers were Matt and Chrissy Stewart**. They shared their experiences dealing with life issues including multiple cancers by both. Their message of hope and optimism were wonderful.



There were a number of informative workshops that our District members attended. Three new topics at this Convention were used at our Convention.



Thanks to the members from our District that attended the Convention as well as our District Dinner; **Debra Fry (Tamarac)**, **Bob & Linda Hamblin (Windsor Gardens)**, **Ken & Terri Kearney (LAPD)**, **Larry & Ashleigh Pulaski (Monaco South/DTC)**, **Andrew Stanger (Windsor)**, and **Gary & Lisa Banninga (Windsor)**. The next OI Convention (109th) is in New Orleans on July 6-9 2027. **Lisa Banninga** District Ambassador

District Foundation Awards

Bob Hamblin Governor Elect

At the recent 3rd Quarter Conference on April 25th, District Foundation Representative Linda Hamblin presented awards to several clubs.

They included

“365 Club Award” patches to Windsor, Monaco South, and Westminster/Broomfield Clubs.

This award recognizes the club's contribution of at least \$365 to the Foundation.

Additionally, **twenty-one clubs were awarded “Dollars Per Member” patches**, the highest being **Park Hill Optimist Club, with an average of \$83.33 per member.**

A President's Club pin was awarded to Susan Brasel of Tamarac, recognizing her contribution of \$250/year to the Foundation. We currently have 17 members in our district who have achieved this honor.

Unrestricted contributions so far this year total \$7,395, with an average of \$8.89 per member. This currently puts us in 11th place in the world.

Thank you all very much for your generosity. We are halfway through the current year, so there is still time for you and your club to make a difference and donate to the Optimist International Foundation.

District Foundation News By Linda Hamblin District Foundation Representative.

I am very pleased to report that you, the members of the Colorado / Wyoming District, are strongly carrying on your long standing tradition of being leaders in contributions to the Optimist international Foundation. **As of the end of July, YOU have contributed over \$12,000 unrestricted dollars to the Foundation, averaging \$14.45 per member.** This puts us in 11th place in the world for overall contributions. We are in **2nd place in the world with contributions to Childhood Health and Wellness totaling nearly \$1,000.** We have 18 contributors, or over 2 percent of our members who are President's Club contributors, with donations of \$250 / year per person, putting us in 4th place in that category.

Finally, nearly twenty percent of you have pledged a Dime-a-Day, putting us in 2nd place in the World! Colorado / Wyoming Optimists.

YOU are Amazing! Your generosity has not gone unnoticed! I was pleased to be recognized by several of the administrators of the OI Foundation at the International Convention for the outstanding contributions YOU have made. We are a mid-sized district, yet we consistently have ranked in the top ten for our giving.

On behalf of the kids, and the many programs your Foundation dollars support, a HUGE THANK YOU!! I Am Proud of You!

Sincerely, Linda

Changes to the OI Club Recognition Program— Bob Hamblin, Gov Designate



Over the past couple of years, OI has taken a long, hard look at the set of goals which clubs and districts had to reach in order to receive Honor or Distinguished status. Individual clubs and districts were given a very strict and rigid set of criteria to meet. As was often the case, no matter how outstanding their achievements, if they fell short of even one minor factor, they were knocked completely out of the running. Smaller clubs, with fewer resources, and even larger clubs were beginning to feel such lack of recognition was not worth their effort. In order to increase engagement and commitment in clubs and districts, OI has created a “cafeteria” style program, in which clubs can meet increasingly challenging levels of achievement.

The new Club Health Awards Program, (CHAP), provides a minimum set of standards, plus three Levels of Recognition.

Clubs can choose to attain certain “Benchmarks” within Five key Categories: Youth & Community Impact, Membership Engagement, OI Foundation Support, Club Leadership/Administration, and Membership Growth.

Your Lt. Governors and Club Presidents have many more details about this new way of recognizing both you and your club’s hard work.. It’s gratifying to know that OI really listened to us! Thank you all so very much for all you do! I Am Proud Of You!

In the Spirit of Optimism

Bob

SAVE THE DATE!

Colorado/Wyoming Optimist District 1st Quarter Conference

Saturday, November 7, 2026 9:00AM - 3:00PM

Centerpointe at Windsor Gardens

595 Clinton St. Denver CO 80247

Great Food! Including a Best Dessert Competition!

Special Guests include the winner of the District and Southwest

Regional Oratorical Contest! Musical

Entertainment by the Voices Rock Youth Choir

Don’t Miss the Fun!

Details and Registration Information are coming

District Oratorical Information 2027 Steve Gorrell District Chair

The Oratorical Contest is open to students who have not reached the age of 19 before October 1, 2026, 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: "How My Actions Strengthen Those Around Me"

All contest will be Combined Gender.

Clubs will send their 1st and 2nd place winners to the Regional Contest. The Regional Contests will be held via Zoom on April 10, 2027.



1st , 2nd and 3rd place Regional winners will then go to the District Finals being held on April 24,2027 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-Macaelle Vasquez** sponsored by the Littleton Breakfast Club, won the Southwest Regional Contest in St Louis and won a \$5,000 dollar scholarship. She did not place in the top 3 of the World Contest. Macaelle Vasques was the 3rd Colorado-Wyoming District entry in the World Contest to win the Southwest Regional contest!

The Club contest must be completed on or before March 26, 2027. 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 2, 2027 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. 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 getting ready to start. 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 or me.

Steve Gorrell, CO-WY District Oratorical Chairperson 2026-2027
Sgorrell1@yahoo.com 720-308-1982

Optimist Jr Golf Bob Meyer

Colorado-Wyoming Optimist Junior Golf is recognized as one of the best Junior Golf Programs in all of Optimist International and serves about 250 junior golfers each year.



We had 246 junior golfers compete in the 2026 District Qualifiers in June 2026 and sent 49 of them to THE 2026 OPTIMIST, held in late July 2026 at Trump National Doral Resort in Miami, Florida. Dozens of local Optimists and their friends volunteered at the three District Qualifiers, acting as forecaddies and marshals, maintaining pace of play, and ensuring that the junior golf competitors played in professionally run District Qualifiers.

Our Colorado junior golfers usually make up almost 10% of the field at THE OPTIMIST. Colorado-Wyoming Optimist Junior Golf is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and is totally self-funded. **We sent 49 junior golfers to THE 2026 OPTIMIST and raised almost \$ 50,000 for that purpose.** We were able to give THE 2026 OPTIMIST registration fee of \$ 750 to each of the seven age group winners and \$ 500 to the 42 other qualifiers.

The registration fee covers five nights lodging at Trump National Doral Resort; three rounds of tournament golf; a meal badge good for five breakfasts and four dinners served buffet style; and other fun activities during the five days and nights of **THE OPTIMIST**.

As part of our fund-raising activities in 2026, we held an adult scramble fundraising tournament on Wednesday, May 28, at Meadow Hills Golf Course in Aurora.

We also had an online auction of about two dozen donated golf foursomes from top Metro Denver country clubs and public golf courses. Other items in the online auction included fine wine, Divot Golf Green Saver books, framed pictures, and gift cards.

We also solicit title, hole, banner, and player sponsors for the District Qualifiers that were held at Overland Park, Flatirons, and Meadow Hills from many Colorado-Wyoming District Optimist Clubs; individual Optimists; and friends of Optimists. and their businesses.

In addition, we solicit cash and in-kind donations from local golf courses, parents of our junior golfers, and the general public.

At this year's Championship, we had a total of five volunteers from Colorado: **Tom Mehl and Ev Sequeira** from the Gateway Optimist Club, and **Larry Pulaski and Bob Meyer** from the Monaco South and Denver Tech Center Clubs, and **Ashleigh Pulaski from the Denver Tech Center Optimist Club**

Pictures of the Colorado junior golfers at THE 2026 OPTIMIST:



Phase 1 - Boys 10-11 and 12-13



Phase 2 - Boys 4-15 and Girls 13-14



Phase 3 - Boys 16-18 and Girls 15-18



Fearless leader, Bob Meyer

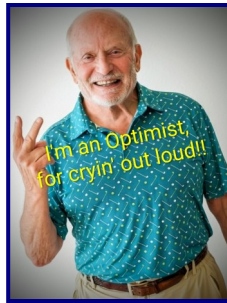
Gateway OC Very Busy As Year Winds Down



On the left, Oratorical Contest winners with Oratorical chair JoAnn and President Sheila. Picture on right shows all the Contestants.



In May, Gateway members participated in a packing event for **Sweet Dream in a Bag**. Each bag holds bedding, spread, sheets, pillow and sham, blanket, and some other accessories for children in transition or other need.



Gateway member **Jack Rego** and the club's motto!

Essay Contest participants and 3 winners with medals



Rockies Game Honored Larry Walker

Sunday, August 23rd was the game day the Tamarac and DTC clubs collaborated to distribute a special commemorative item to the fans. The Colorado Rockies honored one of their franchise legends with a **15-foot, 800 pound bronze statue of Hall of Famer Larry Walker**, outside Coors Field, and we presented fans with 10 inch plastic replica of that statue,. (15,000 were distributed!) 35 volunteers were stationed at the 6 gates. This group gave out 3,000 at Gate A



Larry Walker in person!!

