Twin City Area Optimist Club

P.O. Box 475
Festus, Missouri 63028
www.twincityoptimist.org
Follow us on Facebook
Affiliated with Optimist International
Serving Youth and Community since 1919

September 2026 News
Making a Difference For Kids

President Cathy Elliott

Celebrating a Year of Growth, Service & Optimism

As we look back on this past year, there is so much to celebrate! The Twin City Optimist Club continues to grow, flourish, and find new ways to serve our community and make a difference in the lives of youth.

Here are just a few of the accomplishments we can proudly celebrate:

Recognition & Leadership

- After **15 years**, we once again earned the honor of being named a **Distinguished Club of the Year!**
- Our club brought home **two Governor's Choice Awards**:
  - **Katie Huck** – *Bringing Out the Best in Youth*
  - **Jan Buechting** – *Rookie of the Year*
- **Mary Hatfield** will serve as **EMO Governor for 2026–2027**.
- **Barb Schmidt** will serve as **Lieutenant Governor for 2026–2027**.
- **Olivia Blair**, a member of our JOI Club, was elected as a **Director on the Junior Optimist International Board**.

Growing Our Club & Getting to Know One Another

This year, we found new ways to strengthen our membership and build connections within our club.

- **14 new Optimist members** joined us this year!
- **Carolyn McKinney** added a *Member Spotlight* to our monthly newsletter, giving us an opportunity to learn more about the wonderful people who make up our club.
- Marian Bozak introduced fun icebreakers at several meetings, helping us get to know one another a little better.
- **Ruth Ann Adams**, inspired by an idea she saw at the Optimist International Convention in St. Louis, began presenting **The Optimist Creed** each month

and explaining the meaning behind each line.
- Our **C.A.R.E meetings** continue to give us valuable insight into what our members feel we need, and we continue to put those great suggestions into action.

Serving Our Community

One of the things that makes our club special is our willingness to step up when our community needs us.

- For the **first time in our club's history**, we spent Optimist Week in February volunteering throughout our community. Members served at **Brenden's Backpack, Foster Together, De Soto Library, and Head Start programs in both De Soto and Hematite.**
- **Elsie Williams** suggested an opportunity for her great-grandson to earn service hours. That sparked an idea! We reached out to other members with grandchildren and created a team of young helpers who assist with the heavy setup and teardown needed for community events.
- **Carroll Metzger** introduced our **Sun Safety** initiative. We now distribute sunscreen and prevention information while participating in community events.
- We continue to look for opportunities to connect with and serve organizations throughout our community.

Fundraising & Community Partnerships

Our members continue to prove that when we work together, great things happen!

- **Carol Schanz** introduced our first **Easter Baked Goods Raffle**. It was a tremendous success—we raised **$1,650 in less than 30 minutes!**
- ***All Fundraising exceeded expectations!!!***
- **Katie Huck's sponsorship team** brought in **12 new sponsors** for our Sponsorship Program.
- We joined the **Jefferson County Growth Association**, expanding our community connections.
- We continue to network with the **Twin City Chamber of Commerce** and **The Leader Publications**.
- The Leader invited the Optimists to serve as their **donor of choice** at this past year's Wedding Fair.
- **Katie Huck** is now representing our club on local radio station **JKFF** …and they want us back to talk about all of our events and programs!

The Optimist Bicycle Playground

After **two long years of planning**, an exciting vision is finally becoming a reality!

The **Optimist Bicycle Playground** is coming to life thanks to the vision and determination of **Becky Francis**, along with her team, **Katie Huck and Carroll Metzger**.

And we aren't stopping there. Our **first-ever Capital Campaign** is now underway to help make the Bicycle Playground a reality.

This is a wonderful example of what happens when an idea is met with enthusiasm, persistence, and a team willing to turn a dream into something our community can enjoy for years to come.

Growing Junior Optimist International

Our JOI Club has also taken some exciting steps forward this year.

- **Marian Bozak** agreed to serve as our JOI Club Advisor, with **Shelly Storment and Jessica Korte** as Co-Chairs.

- JOI Club **bylaws** were written and approved by the board.
- **JOI Club governance** with the Twin City Area Optimists was established and approved by the board.
- JOI Club meetings and events will now be included on our **Google Calendar**, making it easier for Optimist and JOI members to stay connected.
- Optimist and JOI members will begin working together on projects and activities – coming soon.

Looking Ahead
Thirty-eight years is something to celebrate—but what excites us most is what comes next.

This past year showed us that **growth doesn't happen by accident**. It happens because members have ideas, step forward, say *"I'll help,"* and work together to turn those ideas into action.

From welcoming new members and developing young leaders to serving our community, growing our partnerships, raising funds, and bringing the Bicycle Playground closer to reality, this has truly been a year of **optimism in action**.

Thank you to every member who gave their time, talent, energy, ideas, and heart this year.

Here's to **38 years of Twin City Optimism—and to many more years of making a positive difference in the lives of youth and in our community!**

Keep Optimism Alive!

Submitted by Cathy Elliott

Use this link to view the slide show celebrating Cathy's Presidency: https://canva.link/1peurroneyyes1x

NEW MEMBERS

Doris Quiles (left) with sponsor Danelle Winters

ANNOUNCEMENTS & BOARD UPDATES

Coats for Kids: We were awarded $7,000 from the Jefferson Foundation and the money should be available the first week of JANUARY.

Koeze Nuts books and order forms were distributed at the September 17 meeting. This is an annual fundraiser for our club. **PLEASE** help to make a purchase or sell to anyone you know…every dollar helps our projects!

C.A.R.E. Program – we are one of the few clubs that runs this program each year. It is very important to track what people say, feel and suggest. These are some actions that will be taken in response to the feedback from this year's survey:

- In the coming year, Cathy Elliott will focus on New Member Orientation.
- Donna Masters and Jan Buechting will plan some local Thursday Evening Outings.
- Donna Masters, Jan Buechting and Cathy Elliott will look at the "Need to Work on" presented at the meeting and implement what they can.

Optimist Badges – New Optimist badges will be ordered soon. More information to come.

Historian – the board agreed that a historian is needed. Jane Buechting will be looking for a volunteer to take on this role.

Four **new members** were voted in at the September 8 board meeting.

- Susy Bay
- Doris Quiles
- Renee Reuter
- Yvonne Moser

Welcome ladies!

Submitted by Cathy Elliott and Carolyn McKinney

Member Spotlight
Laura English

Laura English first learned about the Twin City Area Optimist Club by hearing member Judy Williams talk about it at their parish, Our Lady Catholic Church. She didn't express interest right away, but several months later she overheard another conversation about the club and decided it was time to learn more. She reached out to Judy, and in June 2025 she officially joined the club. As a member, Laura has found meaningful ways to fulfill her desire to be a volunteer and support kids in the community.

Since joining, Laura has been very active, jumping into a wide range of club events and activities. She has collected food for Brenden's Weekend Backpacks, packed dictionaries, helped at Head Start parties, sorted art for the annual art contest and even served as a judge for the essay contest. She enthusiastically attends fundraisers and has discovered that Bunco makes for a very fun evening!

Laura retired from a job in the Administration of Criminal Justice for the State of Nevada. She and her husband Mark relocated to the St. Louis area four years ago to

be closer to her daughter and three of her grandchildren. She also has a grandchild in Nevada and one in Minnesota.

Laura enjoys traveling, but since relocating to Missouri her interest in hiking and camping has faded. She's found the Midwest's insect population far more off-putting than anything she encountered in the Nevada high desert.

The line of the Optimist Creed that speaks most to Laura is "To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile". She loves that it's a call to positively influence others and embraces the idea of paying it forward. She's been known to surprise the car behind her in a drive-thru by paying for their order, sparking a chain of kindness that often carries on long after she's driven away.

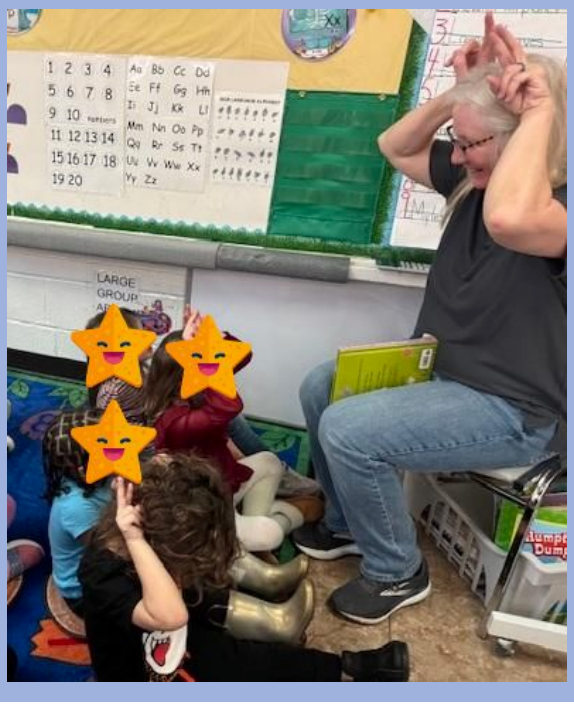
Laura's enthusiasm, kindness, and willingness to jump in wherever help is needed have made her a valued member of our club. Her upbeat nature, her readiness to serve, and her habit of spreading kindness—sometimes quite literally paying it forward—embody the spirit of the Optimist Creed.

With husband Mark

Happy Halloween!

Some favorite photos from Laura's travels

Volunteering at events!



Enjoying the social activities

September 3, 2026
Bicycle Playground

At the September 3 meeting, the Optimist members spearheading the Optimist Bicycle Playground, Becky Francis, Katie Huck, and Carroll Metzger, presented the history, current state, and future plans for the project. The purpose of the playground is to provide a place for kids to learn to ride their bicycles safely, to

promote a healthy life-style, to bring families together and to create social connections.

About two and a half years ago, Becky noticed a young child learning to ride his bike on the walking path at Larry Crites Park. She also noticed an older individual walking along the same path in the opposite direction. While nothing happened that day, Becky recognized the potential for an accident with an unsteady child on a bike and an older individual who may not be able to move out of the way quickly, if necessary. From that initial observation, the vision for the Optimist Bicycle Park began to take shape.

Becky took the idea of a designated bicycle park for children to the City of Festus and based on their input, presented her idea to the Optimist New Project committee for approval. Along the way, she enlisted Katie and Carroll to assist with the plan. After more than two years of planning and multiple park locations suggested by the Festus Parks Department, there is now a designated location at Larry Crites Park. A design for the park with multiple tracks has been approved.

Funding is one of the keys to the success of this project as the total cost is estimated at $700,000. The contract for the design of the park was funded by The Foundation of the Twin City Optimist Club. The first dedicated fundraiser, a Pickleball Tournament at Jokerst Park on October 3-4, received funding from a Festus Tourism grant. A grant application also has been submitted to The Jefferson Foundation and other grants are being investigated. A capital campaign is planned.

After the presentation of the playground, Ellen Bridgewater shared that changes in the 2026 tax season may encourage individual donations. Members should check with their own tax preparer for details.

This is an exciting project for our club and we thank Becky, Katie, and Carroll for all of the work they've dedicated to the project so far!

Submitted by Carolyn McKinney

September 10, 2026
Optimist Creed

Phyllis Neff read off the “grayed out” lines on the Optimist Creed before turning the meeting over to Ruth Ann Adams . Ruth Ann proceeded to lead led us through the history of the creed and provided members with activities which helped to take pieces of the creed to a deeper level of understanding.

In the early 1900s, Christian D. Larson composed an essay called “Promise Yourself” with 24 personal promises a person should utilize to live a happier and more meaningful life. In 1912, a full text of the popular essay was published. In 1922, Optimist International was organized in St. Louis with 10 of the essay’s promises adapted into what we know today as the Optimist Creed.

In 1923, the remaining 14 promises were discovered below the fold when the original newspaper article of the essay was reviewed. These promises are more personal in nature, focusing on self-discipline, inner growth, and character. Regardless of the number of promises read, the message is the same: Think well. Do good. Stay true. Make a positive difference.

After sharing the history of the original essay, Ruth Ann asked that we, as individuals at each table, choose one promise and share its importance with the others around the table. Then, each table shared one of the promises with the club. We were then asked to pick one line that speaks strongest to our table as a whole, discuss the line among ourselves, and share it with the club.

Club members offered great thanks to Ruth Ann for leading us through the creed in a very thorough manner. We can now better internalize and live out the words we repeat at each meeting.

Submitted by Karen Huskey

Ruth Ann Adams with Creed information handouts.

September 17, 2026
Sponsorship Luncheon
Foster Together

The annual sponsorship luncheon was held on September 17, 2026 at Taytro's. Sponsors at levels Gold, Platinum, and Platinum Plus were invited to attend the meeting. The 15 sponsor attendees represented the following: The Hagans ,Commerce Bank, MN & Associates LLC, Sapaugh GM Country, Tucker Homes, Twin City Toyota/SCION, Rose Lawn Monuments, Southern Wealth Management/Ameriprise, Thomas Industrial Coating and H.W. Herrell Distributing.

After lunch, Jean Naeger presented a slide show of many of our club's projects. She highlighted signature projects and talked about the costs involved. Katie Huck then introduced the sponsors to the Optimist Bicycle Playground project, explaining the design and the club's plans to raise funds for construction.

Laura Storm from Foster Together was also invited to this luncheon. She spoke to the sponsors about the support her organization receives from our club. The committee that coordinates with Foster Together had been shopping and the back room was filled with educational toys and games for Laura to take back to her boutique.

The sponsors were excited to be with us and were very receptive to learning about the projects their sponsorships help support. Overall, it was a very good meeting!

Submitted by Carolyn McKinney

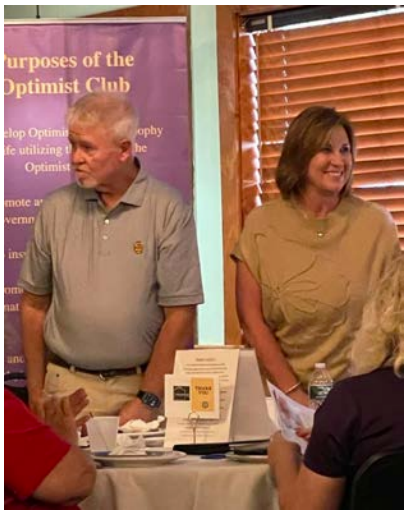
The Speakers

Jean Naeger led the presentation.

Katie Huck talked about the bicycle playground.

Laura Storm shared the history of Foster Together and the TCA Optimist Club.

Sponsors and Guests



Foster Together Donation

Some of the donations for Foster Together

The Foster Together committee holding toys and games they selected: Sue Jokerst, Dorothea Kehm, Laura Storm (Foster Together), Susan Declue, Jean Naeger, Mary Kay Scott, Nicki Russell, and Karen Huskey

---

September 24 2026

The speakers at the September 24 meeting were incoming President Donna Masters and incoming President-elect Jan Buechting.

Donna Masters introduced herself and shared her professional background along with her extensive experience working in non-profit organizations. She has a strong background in marketing, an understanding of national regulations affecting non-profits, and experience networking the non-profits in and around Jefferson County. The priorities she outlined for her term as president are:

- Strengthening youth programs
- Building and Maintaining Club membership
- Boosting Club Visibility
- Improving Club Operations through the use of Technology

Donna thanked Cathy Elliott for sharing her knowledge of "how to run the club" and for the knowledge transfer to herself and Jan as she hands over the reins.

Jan Buechting introduced herself by sharing highlights from her 40-year career with Mercy, where she served in a wide range of roles. Her experience in project management and information technology have built strengths that she’s excited to bring to the club. Jan’s role as president- elect is to support the president, organize the club's projects and support the chairs of those projects. Jan will also hold the position of sergeant-at-arms and collect those $1.00 donations for brags, birthdays, and pictures in the local paper. And as any good job description will include, "duties as assigned".

A heartfelt thank-you to Cathy Elliott for her dedicated two years as president, and a warm welcome to Donna and Jan as they step into their new leadership roles!

Submitted by Jan Buechting and Carolyn McKinney

CLUB PROJECTS

Aunt Rose Project

Renee Gerlach founded the Aunt Rose Project several years ago when she became aware of students and foster girls who were missing school because they lacked period products. Once she had her program in place, Renee spoke to the Twin City Area Optimist Club and its board voted to help with the project. Each year the club donates products to Aunt Rose. This year Optimist shoppers met at Panera in Festus to shop for donations online. By ordering online they were able to have the purchases delivered directly to Renee. Our continued support helps Aunt Rose keep dignity and comfort within reach to girls in need.

Committee: Karen Huskey, Chair
Donna Long, Debbie Floyd

Submitted by Karen Huskey

Aunt Rose donations received and stored

Foster Together

On September 15, members of the Twin City Area Optimist Club met at Target in Fenton to shop for Foster Together, one of the club's partner organizations. The shoppers spent $1000 on educational toys and games that will be distributed to foster children through the Foster Together Boutique in Arnold, MO. The toys were presented to Foster Together Executive Director Laura Storm at the September 17 general meeting.

Karen Huskey, Jean Naeger, Rosie O'Shaughnessy, Sue Jokerst, Nicki Russell, Susan Declue, Dorothea Kehm, and Mickie Huskey

---

Dorothea Kehm and Mickie Huskey

Nicki Russell, Susan Declue, Sue Jokerst, and Karen Huskey

Twin City Optimists Take to the Radio

Twin City Area Optimist Club member Katie Huck is lighting up the airwaves on AM 1400 KJFF Radio. Each month she is spotlighting the exciting projects and community-boosting events

the club has on the horizon. Tune in to hear optimism in action!

September 15 interview:
https://www.mymoinfo.com/kjff-newsmakers-9-15-26-the-bottleneck-bridge-ride-and-main-mill-streetfest-coming-on-october-10th/

Twin City Days Family Bowling

The JOI Club hosted the Twin City Days Family Bowling event on September 11, 2026 at Quonset Lanes. Debbie Schumaker, Carol Schanz, Marian Bozak, and Shelly Storment from the Twin City Area Optimist Club joined JOI Club members at the event. From 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., families received one free game and free shoe rental. In addition, 63 kids received a $5.00 voucher they could use towards food purchases. It was a fun, friendly evening that brought JOI spirit to the lanes and smiles to families across Twin City Days.

Submitted by Debbie Schumaker, Adult Advisor

The Twin City Area Optimist Club held a bike helmet clinic during Twin City Days on September 12, 2026. The Optimist's booth was located on Festus Main Street by Petite Paree Restaurant. The set-up crew started at 7a.m. and the event ran from 9a.m. to 3 p.m.

The bike helmet clinic provided free bike helmets for kids with Optimist volunteers sizing the helmets for proper fit for each child. The helmets given away were available in sizes toddler, small, medium, and large. At the end of the day, 134 happy children were fitted with bike safety helmets.

Volunteers registered the children and collected photo-release forms from parents. While parents waited, additional volunteers shared information about The Twin City Area Optimist Club and answered questions. Interested parents were encouraged to complete an information card, which was then given to Jean Naeger for follow-up calls.

Tickets for a bike raffle also were sold at the booth for a bike generously donated by Mary Hatfield. The raffle raised $180 and the winner, Linda Higgins, picked the bike up before the booth closed in the afternoon.

The day wrapped up with strong community engagement and volunteers who once again showed what Optimist service looks like in action. Thank you to all of the volunteers who participated throughout the day!

Committee: Katie Huck, chair with Mary Hatfield and Jan Buechting as co-chairs. Participants: Peggy Scott, Jen Gyngard, Mason Gyngard, Jan Buechting's husband, Pat Parsons, Josalyn Dunlap, Sue Joggerst, Debbie Hogenmiller, Donna Masters, Carol Schanz, Suzy Bay, Marian Bozak, and Janice Boyd.

Submitted by Katie Huck

Marian Bozak, Janice Boyd, Donna Masters, Mary Hatfield, Katie Huck, and Suzy Bay at the Twin City Days Optimist Booth.

Dictionary Project

Dictionaries are on their way! The Twin City Area Optimist Club's Dictionary Project takes place from August through September each fall. Currently, most books have been delivered with some school deliveries still pending.

The key objectives and goals of the Project are:

- Promote Literacy: Give students an essential tool for a quality education that they can use both at school and at home.
- Support Third Graders: Target children primarily in the third grade, which educators view as the critical transition period from "learning to read" to "reading to learn".
- Encourage Independence: Foster self-confidence and critical thinking skills as children look up words, sound them out, and discover facts independently.
- Provide Personal Ownership: Ensure children have a tangible, permanent resource that belongs entirely to them, often serving as the first book they have ever owned.

The Optimist Dictionary Project serves third grade students in 12 Jefferson County public and private schools. This year 50 teachers and 1,008 students received a copy of the dictionary. We purchased 43 cases (24 books per case) at $108/case (Prices are up from $96/case in 2025) totaling: $4644.00.

The number of dictionaries distributed to each school were: Festus Intermediate – 276 books, Twin City Christian Academy - 12 books, Telegraph Intermediate - 80 books, Crystal City - 42 books, Pevely - 108 books, Sunrise - 43 books, Vineland - 168 books, Hillsboro - 47 books, Grandview - 47 books, Our Lady - 17 book, Christian Outreach - 13 books and St Rose Catholic - 11 books.

Seventeen Optimists volunteered at St. Pius on sorting day: Laura Lohman, Kim Politte, Judy Williams, Jessica Korte, Janice Boyd, Marie Strong, Jean Naeger, Carroll Metzger, Laura English, Debbie Hogenmiller, Donna Arnold, Alicia Cummiskey, Kirstie Zych, Susan Declue, Marian Bozak, Karen Huskey, and Michelle Horrell. Thank you, ladies.

Submitted by Laura Lohman

Volunteers who sorted and packed dictionaries.
First row: Carroll Metzger, Susan Declue, Judy Williams, Jean Naeger, Laura English, Alicia Cummiskey, Debbie Hogenmiller, Marian Bozak, Michele Horrell, Janice Boyd
Back row: Karen Huskey, Laura Lohman, Jessica Korte, Kirstie Zych, Donna Arnold, Marie Strong, Kim Polette

---

Laura English, Laura Lohman, Carroll Metzger, and Judy Williams

Kim Polette, Kirstie Zych, Janice Boyd, Jean Naeger, and Jessica Korte

---

Brenden's Friday Backpacks Food Drive

The Twin City Area Optimist Club sponsored a community food drive for Brenden's Friday Backpacks on Saturday, September 26, 2026 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Festus Walmart. Our Optimist members handed out flyers to and received food donations from Walmart customers.

We collected 8,606 single-serve items, $406.85 in cash donations and $20 via GiveButter, all to benefit Brenden's Friday Backpacks.

Committee: Kirstie Zych and Debbie Hogenmiller
Member volunteers included: Becky Francis, Carroll Metzger, Debbie Schumaker, Marian Bozak, Pat Doenges, Carol Schanz, Jan Buechting, Dana Hanna, Laura English, Marie Strong, Carol Watson, Phyllis Neff, Nancy McAnany, and Junior Optimists Olivia and Oscar Blair.

Submitted by Kirstie Zych

Front: Dana Hanna and Carol Watson
Back: Nancy McAnany and Phyllis Neff

Marie Strong, Laura English, and Jan Buechting

Kirstie Zych and Debbie Hogenmiller next to a pile of donations!

Kirstie Zych, Carol Schanz, Pat Doenges, and Marian Bozak

Debbie Hogenmiller, Becky Francis, Jean Naeger, JOI Club members Oscar and Olivia Blair, Phyllis Neff, and Carroll Metzger

Dime -A- Day
Optimist International Foundation

The Dime-A-Day Program

What is Dime a Day? An annual contribution level to the Optimist International Foundation, (OIF) which is the charitable fundraising arm of Optimist International. The amount represents a donation of **one dime ($0.10) per day** for one Optimist year (365 days) = **$36.50.** Individual members who contribute at this level are recognized with a special **"Dime-A-Day" lapel pin**.

What the Funds Support

The unrestricted funds raised through the Dime-A-Day campaign are critical because they enable the OIF to support the core programs that reach millions of children each year.

- **Scholarship Contests**
- **Youth Programs**
- **Club Grants**
- **Administrative Support**

Peggy Scott is the club's OIF Representative and can provide you with a copy of the Dime-A-Day donation form or you can download a copy: dime-a-day-form.pdf

Submitted by Jean Naeger

EAST MISSOURI (EMO) OPTIMIST DISTRICT

2026 EMO Convention

CONFERENCE / CONVENTION DATES 2026-2027

First Quarter Conference
Oct. 22-25, 2026
EMO/WEMO Joint Conference
Jefferson City

Second Quarter Conference
Feb. 5-6 , 2027
Virtual Conference

Third Quarter Conference
May 14-15, 2027
St. Louis

Fourth Quarter Convention
Aug 20-22, 2027
Columbia

JOI CLUB
Summer Activities

There was no regular JOI Club meeting in September.

Debbie Schumaker
JOI Adult Advisor

Carol Schanz
JOI Chair

SAVE THE DATES

Note upcoming events. To assist with projects, please contact Committee Chair.

October 1 Officer Installation
October 3-4 Pickleball Tournament
October 6 Board Meeting
October 8 Board Update & All for Family
October 10 Bike Rodeo
October 15 Perfect Attendance Awards & BB5K Update
October 22 P.A.T. Boxes
October 23-25 1st Quarter EMO Conference
October 29 Halloween Party
November 3 Board Meeting
November 5 Board Review
November 12 Meeting
November 13 Art Contest sorting
November 15 Art Show
November 19 Meeting
November 26 NO MEETING

Members meet every Thursday from Noon - 1 p.m. at Taytro's. Please RSVP by 8:00 a.m. on Monday by contacting Kathy Todd.

The last Thursday of the month is an evening meeting held at the United Methodist Church in Festus. Members are invited to bring their own dinner at 5:30 to socialize. The meeting starts at 6:00 p.m.

Our Club will continue looking at the sunny side of everything and being committed to bringing out the best in our area youth.

Board of Directors 2025-2026

President
Cathy Elliott
573 883 0924

President Elect
Donna Masters

Past President
Peggy Scott

Secretary
Marian Bozak

Secretary Elect
Jessica Korte

Treasurer
Becky Capps

Treasurer Elect
Ellen Bridgewater

Board Members

2024-2026
Mary McDowell
Debbie Kettler
Carolyn McKinney

2025-2027
Becky Francis
Megan Siracusa
Donna Long

Keep current with club activities, like us on Facebook, and visit our website.

Visit our website

Unsubscribe | Update Profile | Constant Contact Data Notice

Try email marketing for free today!