



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

July 2026 News Making a Difference For Kids

President Cathy Elliott

Greetings, Optimists!

We are now in the final quarter of our Optimist year—and the heat is on!

Fundraising is in full swing as we work to support the projects and events that make a positive difference in our community. Our upcoming NOW (New Optimists Welcome) meeting will, we hope, introduce new members who are eager to join us in our mission of bringing out the best in youth, our communities, and ourselves.

As our calendar fills with activities, we'll need many helping hands to make each event a success. Whether you can spare one hour or several, your time and enthusiasm make a tremendous difference.

Please consider signing up for an hour or two to volunteer at one of our upcoming projects or events. Every smile shared, every conversation started, and every task completed helps raise awareness of Optimist International and strengthens our impact in the community.

Together, let's finish this Optimist year with energy, purpose, and the spirit of "Friend of Youth." Thank you for all you do to keep optimism alive!

Optimistically yours,
Cathy Elliott
President – Twin City Area Optimist Club



ANNOUNCEMENTS & BOARD UPDATES

Around July 23, Liz Christman sent a survey to all Twin City Area Optimist Club members for the **CARE Program**- (C-Celebrate, A-Address, R-Recognize and E-Excel). The purpose of the survey is to show how our members think the club is

doing, what positive things they like, and identify issues they feel need improvement. The results will be presented by Liz at our August 27 evening meeting. Last year we had 44% of our members take the survey so our goal for this year is 50% (69 people)!

The 4th Quarter East Missouri Optimist Convention is scheduled for August 21-23 in Rolla, MO. The theme for Friday is Casino Night while Saturday night will be a banquet. Our own Mary Hatfield will be installed as the new Governor for next year! Contact Jessica Korte if you plan to attend.

Governor's Choice Awards – To nominate a member go to <https://oi-emo.org/> Each member of our club has the opportunity to nominate any member for the following categories:

- Bringing Out the Best in the Youth
- Bringing Out the Best in Our Community
- Bringing Out the Best in Ourselves
- Outstanding Member Award
- Outstanding District Member
- Outstanding Rookie of the Year
- Club President of the Year Award
- Lieutenant Governor of the Year Award
- Best New Club Project Award

JOI Club – Debbie Schumaker and Carol Schanz are stepping down as the Advisor and Chair of the JOI Club as of September 30. We want to thank them for the years they have committed to this club and are thankful for all they have done to inspire Optimist youth. As of October 1, Marian Bozak will assume the Advisor position with Shelly Storment and Jessica Korte as Co-chairs.

Submitted by Cathy Elliott and Carolyn McKinney



Member Spotlight Donna Long



Donna Long first learned about the Twin City Area Optimist Club while out to lunch with her friend — and now fellow member — Shelley Storment. During their meal, they happened to run into Shelley's aunt and uncle, Jean and Chuck Naeger. After

hearing Jean talk about the club and its mission, Donna felt inspired to get involved and officially joined in September 2022.

Donna was especially drawn to the club's community service projects for kids. Before retiring, she worked in payroll at the Ameren Rush Island facility, where employees regularly collected donations and held internal fundraisers for local charities. When she retired, Donna found herself missing that sense of purpose and generosity, and the Optimists stepped in to fill that gap. Through the club, she discovered a new way to continue supporting her community and making a difference for local youth.

As a member of the Optimists, Donna has been involved in many activities. She has helped with Head Start parties as well as party planning for our meetings. Since she first joined, she has assisted with the Essay and Oratorical contests and especially enjoys going to the schools to encourage student involvement with the contests.

Donna and her husband Jon have been married for 29 years and have two daughters. Nikki lives in St. Louis with her husband Robert while Taylor teaches fifth grade in Festus Elementary School. Donna and Jon are passionate about Mizzou football and travel to games regularly. They have a goal of attending a football game in every stadium in the Southern Eastern Conference. Attending a game at the University of Mississippi, fondly known as "Ole Miss," is on their bucket list for 2026.

Donna and Jon enjoy travel, especially their annual vacation in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Some years they travel to see Sammy Hagar in concert, having first seen him together when they were teenagers. They have plans to attend another Hagar concert in 2026

The line of the Optimist Creed that is most important to Donna is, "To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others." She especially connects with the reminder to avoid criticizing others, and it's a principle she continues to work on for herself. This year she also began studying a daily devotional to deepen her understanding of the Bible and strengthen her personal growth.

Donna's optimism shines through everything she does, from the bright, easy smile she brings to every meeting to the friendly, welcoming outlook she shares with new members. Her cheerful presence and generous spirit make her a joy to be around, and her commitment to kindness reflects the very best of our Optimist values.

Submitted by Carolyn McKinney



With husband Jon and the family



Pitching in!





Party Time!



**July 9, 2026
GaitWay, Inc.**

Creed Review

To begin the July 9 meeting, Ruth Ann Adams presented an exercise to reinforce the line from the Optimist Creed "To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile". First, she handed out a sunshine card with a positive message to everyone in attendance. A few people shared the message they received. In the next part of the exercise, everyone received an envelope full of small pieces of paper with joyful sayings such as "Your cheerful spirit is a gift." And "Someone is better today because you showed up". Everyone picked a few people to distribute one of their cards to. It was a lovely exercise in which we got to share our appreciation with our fellow members. Thank you, Ruth Ann!

GaitWay, Inc.

Marian Bozak introduced our speaker, Heather Compton, from GaitWay, Inc. an equine therapy program in Hillsboro that educates girls ages 9 to 18 to work with horses and learn horsemanship skills. The work is transformative for the girls, helping them to build confidence and self-esteem, and to develop emotional regulation and conflict resolution. The program teaches essential life skills such as work ethic, discipline, empathy, grit, responsibility, communication, teamwork, time management, initiative, leadership, and much more.



The girls work 8 hours a week as barn assistants and can earn perks such as riding time and lessons. The community room at the facility is set up as a living area with a full pantry and laundry options so the girls always have a place that feels like a home.



The core program, Dream Makers, currently has 22 girls and 10 horses. Over time, the girls can advance and take on more responsibility. Three members of the Dream Makers are now working directly with the organization's administration or training younger girls.

Dream Chasers is a little sister to the Dream Makers program. It's also available to girls ages 9 to 18 but is an 8-week session to learn basic horsemanship skills. A program for adult women ages 19 and up, Dream Catchers, is also available.

For more information on GaitWay, reference their website at <https://gaitwayinc.org/>

Submitted by Carolyn McKinney

July 16, 2026 Dr. Joe Cangas & Helmets First

Dr. Joe Cangas, AKA 'The Helmet Doctor' attended the July 16 meeting to talk about bicycle helmets and his organization "Helmets First." Dr. Cangas, a long-time

pediatrician in the St. Louis Metro area, started Helmets First in 2004 when he recognized the need for bicycle helmet education.

The goal of Helmets First is to make sure kids have bicycle helmets that fit and that they wear them correctly. Eighty five percent of bicycle-related head injuries can be avoided by wearing a helmet.

Bicycle helmets should be replaced at least every other year because the Styrofoam padding wears out over time. Dr. Cangas warns about purchasing used helmets since the age and quality may be in question. He also explained that the exterior of a bicycle helmet should be smooth so that if the wearer falls, the helmet slides along the ground instead of catching on anything. That raised some questions about kids' helmets that now have ears, mohawks or other attachments. While he couldn't directly address the implications of those add-ons, he stressed that any purchased helmets should be certified by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).



Helmets First partners with many local police organizations to distribute bicycle helmets. Some organizations hand them out on an as-needed basis or may distribute them at events. They also show how to fit and wear the helmets properly. Some of the police organizations may reward kids they see wearing helmets to reinforce the habit.

The Twin City Area Optimist Club first connected with Dr. Cangas when we launched our bike rodeo, to which he generously provided our first 100 helmets at no cost. We've continued purchasing helmets from him ever since. That beginning mirrors the early days of Helmets First itself—built on donated helmets, community partnerships, and a mission to keep kids safe. Today, grants, donation, and bulk purchasing help stretch every dollar, allowing Helmets First to reach even more families across the region.

For more information on Helmets First, refer to their website <https://www.helmetsfirst.com/>

Submitted by Carolyn McKinney

July 23, 2026 Old Bag Luncheon



One of our club's favorite traditions returned at the July 23 meeting: the Old Bag Auction! This annual, mostly internal fundraiser (guests always welcome!) invites members to donate old or new bags—purses, totes, and anything else that qualifies as a “bag”—often filled with mysterious surprises. Each one is auctioned to the highest bidder, and bidding wars are not only allowed, but enthusiastically encouraged.

This year's donated bags ranged from beachy totes to designer labels like Burberry, Coach, and Kate Spade—plus a festive Christmas bag and even a trash bag for good measure. Winners discovered gift cards, alcohol, cash, and an assortment of fun, goofy, and luxury surprises tucked inside.

Our auctioneer, Karen Huskey, embraced a flower-child persona to spark lively bidding. Her assistants, Carol Schanz, Debbie Schumaker and Pat Parsons, kept the crowd engaged as they displayed each bag to excited bidders. By the end of the auction, the club had raised an impressive \$3485!

Thank you to everyone who contributed items and jumped into the bidding fun. Your generosity and enthusiasm made it a joyful, exciting afternoon.

Submitted by Carolyn McKinney





Chef Leroy won a Burberry bag for an excited Trish.



Shirley Coile with some of her many wins.



DaNelle Winters was color-coordinated with her new Coach bag.



Ruth Ann Adams found cash in her Coach bag.



Auctioneer Karen Huskey channeled her inner 60's flower child.



Pat Doenges also found cash in a Kate Spade bag.



Carol Schanz shook some fringe when showing off a western bag for bidding.



Jan Buechting found a bottle of wine and more in her Michael Kors bag.



Carroll Metzger walked away with some western fringe.



Debbie Schumaker stirred up interest in a striped tote bag.



Paige Laiben celebrated an early holiday season with her Santa bag full of gift cards.



Jean Naeger with her Dream tote bag.

July 30, 2026 NOW (New Optimists Welcome)



NOW Meeting Highlights | July 30, 2026

Our **New Optimists Welcome (NOW) Meeting** on July 30 was an absolute success! We were thrilled to welcome **10 guests** to learn more about our mission, our projects, and the impact we make in our community.

Icebreakers & Interactive Fun:

- **M&M Get-to-Know-You Game:** NOW Chair Amy Baum led a fun, interactive game using M&Ms to match questions about the Optimist experience. Members reflected on their journeys while guests answered insightful questions like: *"How did you hear about the Optimist Club, and what sparked your interest?"*
- **Warm Welcomes:** President Cathy Elliott introduced our guests, who represented communities across the region—including Hillsboro, De Soto, Festus, Imperial, Herculaneum, and St. Peters.

Inspiring Our Guests

- **Club Overview:** Jean Naeger presented a brief history of our club, explained the structure of Optimist International, and highlighted key projects serving southern Jefferson County.
- **Foundation & Youth Programs:** Katie Huck shared details about the Foundation of the Twin City Optimist Club, our exciting Bike Playground project, and our Junior Optimist International (JOI) youth initiatives.

Marketing Success & Results

Micro-Grant in Action: Thanks to a recent **\$150 micro-grant**, from the Optimist International Foundation, we launched a targeted Facebook Ad campaign to market this membership event on social media. The timing couldn't have been better!

- **18 Total Facebook Leads Identified**
- **10 Viable Leads Contacted**
- **9 Showed Strong Interest**
- **6 Facebook Leads Attended**
- **4 Member Referrals Attended**
- **2 New Members Joined on the Spot!**

We are excited about the potential to welcome even more of these guests as official members in the coming weeks. Thank you to everyone who helped organize, invite, and host such a fantastic event!

Submitted by Jean Naeger

CLUB FUNDRAISERS

Saturday, August 8

Doors open at 6 pm

Bingo starts at 7 pm



ROCK N ROLL BINGO

Raffles/50-50

**\$25/person or \$200/table
after July 16**

\$30/person or \$240/table

beer & soda provided

Tables of 8



Use QR code to reserve online

<https://givebutter.com/c/MBOG9Z?source=qr&version=1>

Fundraiser Hosted by

Twin City Area Optimist Club

**Place: Amvets Post 42
555 Joachim, Herculaneum, MO**

CLUB PROJECTS

TWIN CITY AREA OPTIMIST CLUB ANNUAL ART CONTEST



November 15, 2026

2:00PM - 4:00PM

Elks Lodge 1721

4 Elks Acres, Festus, MO



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



108 Optimist International Convention

Jacksonville, Florida

June 28-July 1, 2026



2026 Optimist International Convention Club Attendees:

EMO Governor Elect Mary Hatfield
TCA Treasurer Elect Ellen Bridgewater
EMO Immediate Past Governor Jean Naeger
OI Convention First Timer Michele Horrell
EMO Past Governor Phyllis Neff

Twin City Area Optimist Club Well-Represented at International Convention

The Twin City Area (TCA) Optimist Club made a strong showing at the annual Optimist International (OI) Convention, with all attending members actively participating in leadership training, international committees, and program presentations.

Leadership, Service & Workshop Leadership

- **Governor-Elect Preparation:** Mary Hatfield completed official Governor-Elect Training as she prepares to lead as the East Missouri (EMO) District Governor for the 2026–2027 administrative year.
- **International Governance:** Phyllis Neff and Jean Naeger continued their service on OI Committees—Phyllis serving on the International

Convention Committee and Jean on the International Marketing Committee.

- **Workshop Presenters:** Phyllis and Jean also led an interactive convention workshop titled *"Creating Smiles in the Community: Simple, Hands-On Activities for Kids,"* sharing practical youth engagement ideas with Optimists from around the world.

Project Showcases & Knowledge Sharing

- **New Project Exposition:** Michele Horrell and Ellen Bridgewater proudly represented the TCA Optimist Club at the New Project Exposition, showcasing our new Sun Safety Project.
- **General Sessions & Workshops:** All TCA delegates attended daily General Sessions and hands-on training workshops, bringing back valuable organizational updates, fresh service projects, and new strategies to energize our club in the coming year.

Networking & Fellowship

Beyond the formal sessions, attendees capitalized on opportunities to network with fellow Optimists, exchange best practices, and enjoy fellowship during the annual **EMO District Dinner**.

For additional photos and information about convention, please click on Power Point Presentation presented during the July 16, 2026, club meeting. [108 Optimist International Convention report.pptm](#)

Submitted by Jean Naeger



Convention "First Timer" Michele Horrell



Michele Horrell and Ellen Bridgewater manning TCA Club's New Project Display for Sun Safety.



Mary Hatfield announced as
2026-2027 East Missouri Optimist Governor.



Creating Smiles in the Community: Simple, Hands-On Activities for Kids

Jean Naeger and Phyllis Neff were honored to be invited to present a workshop at convention. They offered a hands on, practical approach to planning and running community events. A time to have fun with the kids while networking with the community to increase membership and community partnerships.

EAST MISSOURI (EMO) OPTIMIST DISTRICT



CONFERENCE / CONVENTION DATES

EMO District Convention

August 21, 22, 23, 2026
Installation of Officers
Governors' Choice Awards
Comfort Suites
Rolla, Missouri

JOI CLUB

There was no JOI Club meeting in July.

Debbie Schumaker
JOI Adult Advisor

Carol Schanz
JOI Chair



SAVE THE DATES



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

August 4 Board Meeting
August 6 Board Updates
August 8 Rock 'n Roll Bingo
August 13 Mix it up Meeting
August 20 Meeting - Parents as Teachers Supply Boxes
August 21-23 EMO 4th Quarter Convention

August 27 CARE Meeting
September 3 Meeting - Bicycle Park
September 8 Joint Board Meeting
September 10 Board Meeting Review
September 17 Meeting - Foster Together
September 24 Meeting
October 1 Officer Installation
October 6 Board Meeting
October 8 Meeting
October 10 Bike Rodeo
October 15 Meeting
October 22 Meeting
October 29 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



Twin City Area Optimist Club | P.O. Box 475 | Festus, MO 63028 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!