



[Current Members and UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Club alumni gathered for the Club's 20th Anniversary at Homecoming in October 2014.]

SNAPSHOTS OF OPTIMISM Still Going Strong

Submitted by: Kim Adams, Co-Advisor of UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Club, Southern Wisconsin District



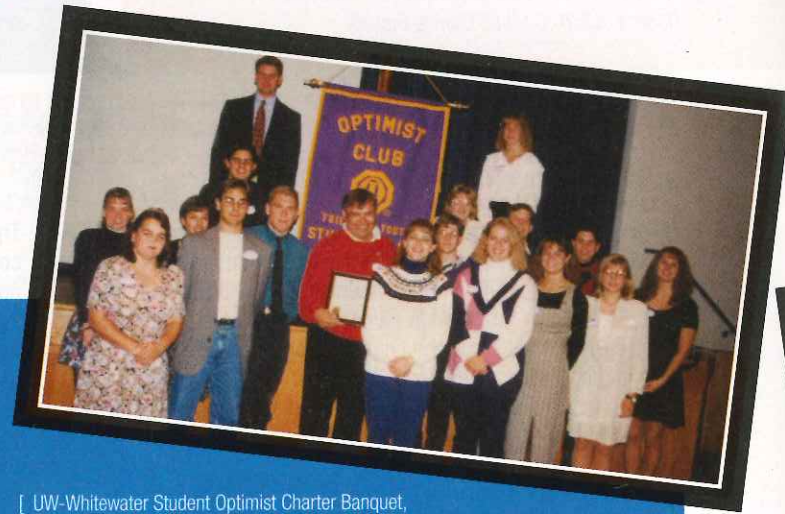
[Intern and 2015-16 SWIS District Lt. Governor Lauren Hageman presents a prize at the Second Annual Trivia Night in February 2015.]

If anyone would have asked back in 1994, what the impact could be of 32 college students forming the University of Wisconsin-Whitwater Student Optimist Club, I am quite certain we would have fallen short on our responses in comparison to actual outcomes.

Twenty-two years later, the response is much clearer. The Charter Members laid the foundation for a small, but strong student organization that has contributed thousands of hours of service to the campus and community, positively impacted kids, built friendships, helped members develop life-long skills, supported the mission of Optimist International, and has taken Optimism to various corners of the world. Its Members have truly made a difference in the world.

Club highlights are numerous, but over the years, a few notable moments stand out. Let's start at the very beginning—after all, "it's a very good place to start!"

- Our 2016-17 Optimist International President Jim Kondrasuk was Charter Governor of the SWIS District and was the District Representative at the organizational meeting of the UW-W Student Optimist Club on September 21, 1994. Jim has often looked to the Student Optimists for insights on reaching their peers and bridging the intergenerational gap.



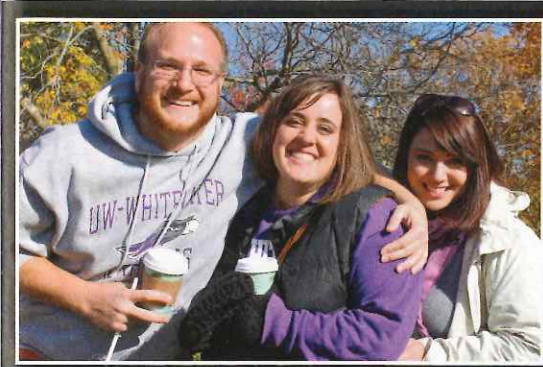
[UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Charter Banquet, October 1994. SWIS District Governor Jim Kondrasuk installed the new officers.]

Kondrasuk said, "The Club has functioned brilliantly since chartering under great student leadership and of course, key faculty advisors. Kim Adams was instrumental in chartering the club, and has served as its advisor since inception. Co-advisor James Lanouette, once a Member of the UW-Whitwater Student Club, has now helped Adams for four years. The UW-Whitwater Student Club has also done a great job in keeping its membership levels relatively constant. We have a new generation of leaders coming to us from the College Club ranks. So we all, as Optimists, owe a great deal of gratitude to the advisors and past and current Members of the UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Club. Our future is in good hands."

- The formation of the Club made history within the Optimist International organization. The UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Club was the first in the world to be formed on a college campus with solely student Members. They hosted a 20th Anniversary Celebration two years ago at UW-Whitwater's 2014 Homecoming.
- In 2001, accounting major Josh Zaidel joined the Club. He became very active, served as Club President, made life-long friendships, served the SWIS District as Secretary/Treasurer, and is now the 2016-17 SWIS District Governor. Josh is the first Club alum to serve in these District capacities.

Zaidel commented, "Being a part of the UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Club helped provide me with the courage, strength, and skills to live an extraordinary life. I am involved with an Optimist Club post college helping the most vulnerable residents of my community and building on those skills as an Optimist District Governor."

- Several years later, Lauren Hageman stepped forward to serve as Lt. Governor for Zone 3 of the SWIS District in 2015-16. Lauren also served as President of her Club, as an intern for the Community Club, and as an active planner for two of the large-scale Optimist Trivia Night events co-sponsored by the Student Club and the UW-Whitwater/Community Optimist Club.



[2016-17 SWIS District Governor Josh Zaidel with former UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Members Jessica Helms and Stephanie (Snittler) Wilson at a UW-Whitwater Homecoming event in 2011.]



[Pictured from left to right: Whitwater Community Optimist Angie Alesci, Service Learning Student Gabrielle Busco, 2016 Spring President Jenna Leibfried, Washington Elementary Art Teacher Mareta Hale, Vice President Lindsay Schaefer, and Co-Advisor Kim Adams.]

Hageman said, "Serving as Lt. Governor has provided me with an excellent opportunity to meet so many amazing people in various clubs and in other communities, while working to give back to my own community. It has really helped me to understand what being an Optimist really entails."

- "Optimist Trivia Night" emerged from the brainstorming of the student Club Members four years ago. The event is a collaborative effort with the UW-Whitwater/Community Optimist Club, raising \$5,400 in its first year, \$8,900 in its second year, and more than \$10,000 in its third year. All proceeds are divided between the two sponsoring Clubs, which in turn, use them to support worthy causes.



["Hallway Beautification Project" completion at Lincoln Inquiry Charter School (LINCS).]

Some of the proceeds from the first "Optimist Trivia Night" were used for shipping an ambulance to Burkina Faso, Africa. In an eight-month period after the ambulance was delivered more than 400 patients were served by the emergency vehicle. The Student Club has coordinated nine service-learning trips over the past 14 years, including to Jamaica; Bay St. Louis, Mississippi; Belize; Ecuador; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Burkina Faso.

After the second "Optimist Trivia Night," the Student Optimist Club contributed proceeds and many service hours to LINCIS (Lincoln Inquiry Charter School). The Club helped to conduct a "Hallway Beautification Project" at LINCIS in May 2015.

Immediate Past President, Jenna Leibried said, "The Student Optimist Club has helped me to step out of my comfort zone and to gain confidence in communicating with people of different ages—kids, parents, teachers and community members. I really love it all."

The third "Optimist Trivia Night" allowed the Club to donate proceeds to a local elementary school. The check for \$3,000 was presented to Washington Elementary in March 2016.

Current Club President Lindsay Schaefer said, "Our Third Annual Trivia Night was not only a success for us Optimists, but for our community, as well. It was great seeing people from all different places come together to participate in such a fun event, while also giving back to those in need. It's incredible how so few people can make such a big difference in the community around them. I can't wait until this next year of Optimism, when we get to share our smiles and our services to help make this world a better place!"



[Co-Advisors Kim Adams and James Lanouette at UW-W 2014 Homecoming. Adams has served as Club advisor for 22 years and Lanouette for four years. James traveled on the first service-learning trip to Jamaica in 2002 when he was a Student Optimist. Becca Schneider (now married to James) traveled on the same trip.]

SO WHAT'S NEXT? Current Members are planning for another ambitious academic year. They are gearing up for Homecoming, the Fourth Annual Trivia Night, and they will volunteer hundreds of hours on many other projects in 2016-17. More Members are being recruited to help with SWIS District events, and yet others are graduating and looking for ways to be involved with other Optimist Clubs or other service organizations. Optimism is still going strong at UW-Whitwater and will continue to live on for years to come.

For more information about the UW-Whitwater Student Optimist Club, contact co-advisor Kim Adams at adamsk@uww.edu or co-advisor James Lanouette at lanouetj@uww.edu.



[The core group of Optimists and travelers who helped to coordinate fundraising and shipping of the ambulance to Burkina Faso, Africa.]