

**Presentation to International Convention Delegates  
by Dwaine Sievers, Chairman of the Board,  
Regarding the Renewal Plan**

(New Orleans, Louisiana – July 7, 2005)

It is an honor to be addressing you today as the first Chairman of the Board of Directors of Optimist International. Two years ago, you voted to change the structure of the International Board to elect six members at large and to have the Immediate Past President serve as the Chairman of the Board. The 2004-05 year is the first year this new Board structure has been in effect. I believe you made a wise decision when you adopted this new structure. It has proven to be an efficient, businesslike way of governing the organization. Board members can now concentrate on larger issues that affect all Optimist Clubs, rather than having to divide their time between governance and attempting to meet regional new club building and membership growth goals. With the election of two new members each year, you have assured continuity of thought and action, as six current Board members will continue to serve.

The members of this first new Board have taken their responsibilities seriously. We have deliberated and debated many issues. We have not always agreed with each other on individual issues, but in the end we have come together to assure that the best interests of the Clubs and the overall organization are served.

One of the decisions we made this year was to instruct the Governance Committee to come up with a rewrite of the existing Constitution and Bylaws. It was obvious to us that the existing document had evolved over time into a confusing, sometimes contradictory, and overly restrictive governance document. In its present state, it makes effective governance difficult, not just for the International Board of Directors but for the Districts as well. I hope you attended this morning's Town Hall session to learn more about the changes. And, at tomorrow afternoon's business session, you will vote on the proposed consolidation of the Constitution and Bylaws into a single document that has been condensed to cover those things that are essential to strong governance, but flexible enough to allow innovation and change when they are needed.

As the Board considered the state of the organization, it became clear from our discussions, and from feedback from many of you, that things need to change. Today, our membership stands at just over 100-thousand members. Fifteen years ago, we had 175-thousand members. Once, we had as many as 42-hundred Clubs. Today, we have 32-hundred. There are many reasons for the decline. You've heard them all, I'm sure. Society has changed. People don't have enough time to volunteer. People don't want to join clubs. The list goes on. Our dependence on awards programs and hard-working volunteers to sustain our growth is no longer working.

For our organization to survive, we have to start doing things differently. While we have many enthusiastic membership recruiters and new club builders in the organization they

alone can't stem the dramatic losses. We have had many dedicated, committed leaders at all levels who have tried to motivate and inspire members to recruit and build clubs. And we applaud their efforts. However, it's getting harder and harder to find people who will commit to holding a leadership role, especially at the district level, because of the demands that are placed on them. Governors are asked to be motivators, coaches, meeting planners, speakers, budget experts, new club builders and organizational managers. They are being asked to do all of those things in their free time, frequently at great personal expense.

In too many districts, it has become very hard to find enough people to fill all of the lieutenant governor positions. Many serve multi-year terms. Some positions go unfilled or the governor doubles as lieutenant governor in a zone or two.

And yet, we have great strengths. The work our Clubs are doing in their communities is stronger than ever. We are positively impacting the lives of kids on a daily basis. We are succeeding in "bringing out the best in kids." We reach over six million kids every year and our Childhood Cancer Campaign is extremely successful.

All of you are dedicated and want to contribute to the well being of the organization. Each of you has some expertise to offer in a specific area; perhaps you are an expert on club administration. Maybe you know how to build a new club. Maybe you enjoy working on membership retention. But despite your dedication and expertise you are unable to commit to a year of being a governor or even lieutenant governor.

With these realities in mind, the Board has held serious discussions on what needs to be done to make this organization function more efficiently, increase our membership, and continue to bring out the best in kids. We met prior to our December and March Board meetings, and held a special meeting in April just to formulate a new strategic, long-range plan. In order to facilitate our discussions, we hired Resource One, Incorporated, the same consulting firm that created our branding slogan, "Bringing Out the Best in Kids." We involved the senior management staff at the International Office, to tap into their many years of administrative experience with the organization. This spring, we completed what we feel is a comprehensive strategic plan for assuring the long-term survival of the organization, and to strengthen the Clubs' ability to serve the needs of young people for many more decades. To emphasize that this plan is intended to strengthen us and allow us to succeed into the future, we are calling it the Optimist International Renewal Plan.

What I'm going to do today is give you a brief overview of the renewal plan. You will be hearing more about it over the next year. Our International reps to your district meetings will be presenting more details. We plan to have it on the Optimist web site so you can study it. We intend to seek and listen to your feedback so that at the convention next year in Nashville we can present you with the strongest plan possible for your approval and implementation. And, tomorrow's Town Hall meeting from 10:30 to 11:30 will be devoted to a discussion of the renewal plan. We are intentionally allowing a year for you

to study it and ask questions. We want you to know what our reasoning was for bringing this plan forward.

One thing I do ask of you is to keep an open mind about the plan. Study it carefully. Ask questions. Don't reject it outright just because it's different. We all have trouble accepting change at times. I can assure you the Board is not making these proposals just for the sake of change. We feel that unless the organization makes some major adjustments in its governance and leadership structure, we will continue to lose members and Clubs. Remember, we have lost nearly 75-thousand members over the last 15 years. If we lose another 75-thousand members over the next 15 years, we may very well not have an organization left by the year 2020.

The first item in the renewal plan is a vision statement. The Board has adopted the following:

“Optimist International will be recognized worldwide as an organization of volunteers committed to Optimism, self-development and the improvement of youth.”

Our mission statement reads as follows:

“Optimist International’s mission is to foster an optimistic way of life through a network of Optimists, dedicated to the full development of their potential in order to provide ever-expanding service to youth, the community and the world.”

We also added a section to the renewal plan called Core Values. We felt it was important to state what is really behind our mission. And we felt there is no better reflection of our Core Values than the tenets of the Optimist Creed.

The renewal plan has four goals, covering structure, growth, programs and marketing. Goal one is “to restructure the organization to improve governance to meet the needs of our members and society more efficiently and effectively.”

Goal two is that “Optimist International will grow to become a thriving, dynamic, progressive organization with members committed to the mission of providing ever-expanding service to the youth, the community and the world.”

Goal three is to “consider, design and implement Optimist programs that will focus on realizing the vision of Optimist International in three core areas: health, education and recreation.”

And our fourth goal is “to develop and implement a strategic marketing plan to create global awareness of the mission, vision and core values, and provide positive support for the growth and sustainability of Optimist International.”

As in all such plans, each of these goals has desired objectives, strategies and tactics. I won't go into all of those today. You will have the opportunity to read them on the web site and in a future issue of the magazine. But all of our long-range plans are predicated on a fundamental change in the way the organization delivers service and assistance to the Clubs, and in the way we utilize the talents of our members outside the Club level.

I want to give you an overview of the restructuring portion of this plan, contained in goal one. Under our proposal, current districts will be consolidated into nine regions

beginning October 1, 2008. Each region will have a regional administrator, a paid professional who will administer the business of the region on a day-to-day basis. All administrative functions currently handled by the District Governor will become part of the Regional Administrator's job description. The functions of Lieutenant Governors will reside primarily with Regional Growth, Education and Communications Action Teams, and their sub-teams. Functions of District Committees will be handled by either the Regional Administrator or the Regional Action Teams.

The regional administrator will work cooperatively with a regional representative, a volunteer elected by the members of the region. The nine regional representatives...all volunteers...will serve as an advisory committee to the international board of directors.

I mentioned Action Teams. These will be comprised of volunteers from throughout the Region. There are no term limits for serving on a team, nor do terms start on any specific date; members may join or drop out as needed. Small groups of volunteers from within each team may be assigned to work in a specific geographic area. Each team may elect an Executive Committee to plan overall goals and strategies in conjunction with the Regional Administrator. The Action Teams will concentrate on growth, education and communications. Each Team may have sub-teams that specialize in one particular activity; for instance, NCB prospecting, NCB organization meetings, Club administration, curriculum development, etc. These action teams will allow members to use their talents in specific areas where they feel they can make the biggest impact, without having to commit to a specific time frame.

An annual Regional Meeting will be held to allow for the election of one Member from that Region as the Regional Representative. Also at the annual Regional Meeting all Regional Action Teams would meet to review progress and plan future objectives. Members from that Region would also have an opportunity to network and socialize.

Under our proposal, Club members would no longer pay District dues. In order to fund the Regional structure, International dues would be increased, but by an amount less than the amount of current District dues. In other words, overall, each member will pay less in dues. Our preliminary estimates indicate that, as a member, you would pay, on average, four dollars less per year than you do now. The portion of dues that are earmarked for the Club would not be affected by this plan. The International Board would then budget the revenue collected for the operation of each of the Regional Administrators offices. One important thing to note: This restructuring of the dues system would allow us to budget as much as 100-thousand dollars PER REGION for marketing efforts, and 200-thousand dollars for marketing on an international level, which would help us meet goal four of the strategic plan.

Let me emphasize one thing about this proposal. Optimist Clubs will continue to function exactly as they do today. Clubs will continue to do youth-service projects in their communities. What this plan does for Clubs is to increase the resources available to assist them in bringing out the best in kids. More Optimist volunteers with experience

and knowledge of Club administration and programs will be available to advise and counsel Clubs on how best to meet their program and growth goals.

There have already been a lot of rumors and opinions floating around about the plan, much of it coming from people who didn't have all of the information about it. Again, I urge you to consider the plan based on the facts, not rumor.

Let me make a few comments about what this plan is not. It is not a federation concept. The Optimist International Board will still be the governing body of the organization, with Board members elected by you, the delegates, at the annual International Convention. Changes to the Bylaws will still be made by International Convention delegates.

This plan does not call for the merger of the Foundations with Optimist International. The Foundations will continue to operate as separate organizations with their own Boards.

I know this is a lot of information to try to digest in such a short period of time. As I said, we will have the detailed plan on the web site, and it will be printed in the Fall issue of the magazine. The international reps to your District conventions will be prepared to discuss the plan as well. Throughout the next twelve months we will continue to provide you with information and offer you opportunities to give the Board your feedback.

We feel this plan will make Optimist International healthier and stronger over the long term, which in turn makes all of our Clubs stronger.

The bottom line is this – what we do is important. It is important for the young people we serve. The Board is already listening to you. We have heard from you that something has to be done to stop the membership loss. That something has to be done to fill the leadership void. That we simply have to strengthen our organization. We have heard you, and offer this plan for your consideration. Thank you.