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# Youth Appreciation Week

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**November 10-16, 2003**

Since 1957, Optimist Clubs have recognized youth for their talents in the arts, athletics, academics, and for contributions to community. Youth Appreciation Week provides the perfect opportunity for your Club to recognize youth and involve them in Optimist activities. This is the most popular Optimist International program with more than 2,000 Clubs participating each year.

## Suggested Activities and Project Ideas

### Government

#### Youth-In-Government Day Ideas

- Sponsor a Youth-In-Government Day during Youth Appreciation Week. This event gives young people the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge about their local or national government. There are many different activities and projects that can complement this special day.

#### Office Tour

- Match up students with city, county, state or provincial government officials for one morning or an entire work day.
- Have students vote for one elected 'official' who will shadow the mayor.
- Involve your Chamber of Commerce in the event.
- Direct a discussion among students regarding what they learned from the experience.

#### Mock Session

- Arrange a mock city council or community development session.
- Topics to be discussed could include city or state government issues such as city budgeting, local crime, water pollution and zoning regulations.
- Elected students would serve one-day terms in various council-reporting positions. On the designated day, they will occupy the desks of the officials and learn about the problems that confront the public servant and how they are solved.

#### Public Servant Internship

- Organize a day or week-long internship program with a local government office.
- Participants are assigned to the supervision of one government employee and assume this individual's job duties for the week.
- Present the interns with citations of appreciation for their service, and celebrate their accomplishments with a recognition lunch or dinner.

#### Mayor For A Day Essay Contest

- Hold an "If I were mayor..." essay contest for students.
- Judge the essays and arrange for the contest winner to accompany the actual mayor of your city for one working day.
- Arrange for the rest of the students to get a tour of city hall.

#### Get Out The Vote! Campaign

- Coordinate and staff a voter registration table in a public place, such as a shopping mall, community center or at a rock concert.
- Volunteer to work at the polls on election day.
- Organize a classroom presentation or assembly that is targeted to an audience of high school juniors and seniors. Include topics such as the history of suffrage in the country, statistics on current electoral turnout and the meaning of the voting privilege in today's society.
- Invite your local election commissioner to bring in a voting machine so that students can get a first-hand look at the process.

#### Patriotism Essay or Speech Contest

- Sponsor a "What is Right With Our Nation?" essay or speech contest.
- The subject may be adapted to incorporate other citizenship themes such as Respect For Law.
- Enlist Club members to be the panel of judges for the contest or request assistance from teachers.
- Present winners with a national flag as a remembrance of their inspiring patriotism.



### **Citizenship Awards**

- Invite student leaders to a special luncheon or dinner to receive recognition as outstanding community citizens.
- Have student council members and faculty committees select the best candidates.

## **Education and Career**

### **“Flip For Youth” Pancake Breakfast**

- Send 10 free tickets to several different elementary schools in your area for presentation to promising children who need an extra boost of encouragement. Work with teachers and principals.
- Make the “Flip For Youth” Pancake Breakfast fun with an enthusiastic Club member as an emcee. At the event, honor these special students with certificates or awards for their academic efforts. Secure donated items to give away as door prizes or to those who have a specially marked plate or cup. Have a pancake flipping contest between several children!

### **“Life In A Day” Field Trip**

- Organize a “Life In A Day” field trip for approximately 20-30 children in elementary or middle school. Allow teachers to choose the students that they feel will benefit most.
- Start the day at the birthing room of a hospital, then travel on to a day care center. There, lead a discussion with students about the choices working parents must make when sending youngsters to day care. Also, talk about the learning years, peer pressure and the differences between vocation training and academic education.
- The next stop in “Life In A Day” could be a textile mill or factory. This visit will show students the trade aspect of vocational education and work. Afterward, visit a nearby college or university. Allow the children to walk around the campus and talk with older students or a counselor about major courses of study and the career choices associated with higher education.
- The highlight of the field trip is a tour of a penitentiary. Arrange for an inmate in rehabilitation to talk about crime and the consequences of bad decision making. Emphasize to the students that convicted individuals in prison do not have the right to make many simple choices, such as turning off the lights or going outside for a walk.

- Next, involve the young people in a visit to a nursing home. Discuss the aging process along with the choices that elderly persons and their family members have concerning long-term care.
- Include a visit to a funeral home in your “Life In A Day” program. There, discuss the effects of lifestyle choices (including the impact of drug and alcohol abuse on health and longevity) along with the effects of non-choice mishaps, such as fatal traffic accidents. Each student should then set up their own funeral by choosing a coffin, clothes, ceremony format, music, etc. Close the field trip with a stop at a cemetery. Present children with their burial “choices” by showing them a mausoleum, urns and ground burial plots.

## **School Field Trips**

Work with a school to sponsor and chaperon an educational field trip to a museum, zoo, police station, fire house or other local place of interest.

### **Donate To Show You Appreciate!**

- Fund-raise or secure donations to purchase computer equipment, books, cassettes, gym and sports equipment for local schools, youth groups, or little league teams.
- Have an assembly or banquet to present the equipment to a student body representative, little league captain, computer Club president, etc.

### **Optimist Scholarships**

- Perform a much-needed service by awarding a scholarship to an outstanding student. The recipient should be recommended by a teacher or school official.
- Base the award not only on scholastic ability, but also on leadership, civic contributions and individual achievements.

### **Motivational Speakers**

Sponsor a motivational speaker for a school assembly. Contact a local “hero,” respected athlete, businessperson or any community member who has led an inspiring life. If no local residents fit the bill, contact a company that contracts motivational speakers and programs.



### **G.E.D. Student Recognition**

Salute young adults who have returned to school to study for the General Educational Development (G.E.D.) Program. This recognition will have a positive effect on these students' self esteem and encourage higher education.

### **Final Exam Survival Kit**

Prepare snacks or small tension reliever toys for students to take home the night before final exams. This will help relieve stress and let them know someone cares about their success.

### **Gold Card Awards**

- Give each teacher three or four "Gold Cards."
- During the week, if a teacher sees a student's grades improve, positive attitude change, or perform a thoughtful act, the teacher will give the student half of a "Gold Card" (both halves should have the student's name on them).
- At the end of the week, hold a small assembly recognizing "Gold Card" winners. Present them with a certificate or award. Have a drawing of "Gold Card" stubs and award prizes to the students whose names are drawn. This will let students know their actions don't go unnoticed and will give them a reason to improve.

### **Mentor Program**

Kick-off a semester or year-long mentor program that involves organizing volunteers to provide tutoring, career education and role modeling to students who need extra attention. Check with your local YMCA branch to find out if they offer mentoring and volunteer your time to the project.

### **Speak Out and Be Heard**

Facilitate a forum for students to meet with their school superintendent and Board of Education to discuss any issues, questions, or problems students have. The same type of forum can be conducted with youth and community officials—mayor, city council, etc.

### **Career Fair**

- Give local high school and college students an edge on the future by organizing a Career Fair at a community center, gymnasium or college campus.
- Invite businesses, trade associations and government agencies to set up display booths at the event. Personnel representatives from these organizations should discuss the responsibilities of available positions as well as the future outlook of the industry or field. Additionally, these individuals should present the requirements for employment including education, technical training and job experience.

### **"Dream Job" Field Trip**

- Arrange for young people to spend the day working with a professional in their preferred field (ex. law, business, education, health care, etc.). For a successful event, a volunteer professional must be found in each "Dream Job" that is chosen by the students and written permission should be obtained from parents beforehand.
- After the business portion of the day is complete, a tour of your city hall can be arranged for the students. A group dinner and discussion is the perfect ending to this career-bound event! Provide the students with photos and/or participation certificates to commemorate Youth Appreciation Week.

### **Youth-In-Business Day**

- Arrange for students to spend a day working in the offices of various businesses leaders in the community. Follow-up this activity by creating a mock company that is run by the students.
- Junior Achievement offers youth business education for elementary, middle and high school students. These programs are intended to educate and inspire young people to value free enterprise, understand business and be work force ready. The high school program allows children to decide on a project, budget and raise funds, and coordinate the manufacturing and sales of the product.



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## Recreation

### Activity Week

Plan an entire week of activities to honor youth in your community. Here are just a few ideas:

- Treasure Hunt - Conduct a week-long Treasure Hunt exclusively for young people. Hide a small treasure (such as a special coin) in a public area and publish daily clues in your community's newspaper. Award a grand prize to the youngster who finds the hidden treasure.
- Bingo - hold a Bingo night at a school or community center and award prizes for different types of Bingo games.
- "Chalk-In" - Invite young children to draw original pictures in colored chalk on an area of pavement at a local park or school. Award prizes for the biggest, best and most colorful drawings. Give away fun items such as art supplies.
- "Car Cram Contest" - Young adults will have a great time at this event! Present the team that fits the most people in a compact car with a large submarine sandwich. This is a great activity to hold in conjunction with a car wash.
- Colossal Cookie Contest - Have youth bake cookies and then present awards such as: best tasting, biggest, best decorated, and most unique recipe. Have a cookie exchange when finished or take the children to a local nursing home to distribute the cookies.
- Mini Golf - Everyone will love to compete in an Optimist mini-golf tournament! Secure a reduced rate for adults and allow children to play for free. Award first, second and third place trophies to participating youngsters. Distribute fun prizes for hole-in-ones and highest scores.
- Talent Night - Invite children and adults to participate in an evening of local talent. Include acts such as guitar playing, singing, dancing and comedy skits.
- Youth Dance/Karaoke - Hire a disc jockey or local band and hold a dance for older grade school students in a school gymnasium. Hire a company to set-up a Karoke machine, so the kids can sing as well as dance the night away! Optimist members should serve as chaperons and provide refreshments.

### Day at the Movies

Provide area youth with the opportunity to enjoy a day at the movies at no cost or at a reduced charge. Parents will be happy to know that their children are attending a well-supervised, positive weekend activity. Club members can dress up as clowns or arrange similar entertainment between scheduled movies. Popcorn and soft drinks are a welcome treat!

### Gutter Sundae Party

Hold an outdoor or indoor Gutter Sundae Party for area young people. Secure new plastic gutters as a donation or purchase them from a local vendor at a reduced cost. The gutters should be cleaned and cut into 4-6 foot sections. Fill the gutters with ice cream, fruits, syrups, cookies, whipped cream and sprinkles and let the kids dig in!

Better yet, have the necessary ingredients on hand and let the kids create and devour their own Gutter Sundae masterpieces!

### Field Day

Plan a Field Day for young people at a local park or playground including the following activities:

- Sack, barrel, relay and egg-in-a-spoon races
- Water balloon or egg toss
- Tug-of-war
- Jump rope competition
- Cakewalk
- "Chalk-In"

### Recreation Night

- Hold a Recreation Night at a school gym for area youth. "Get into the groove" by hiring a disk jockey, local band or by simply bringing a radio to the event!
- Set up half-size volleyball and basketball courts in the gym. For the less athletic, provide games such as indoor bowling, bingo or trivia.
- Present fun awards for the winning volleyball team, best basketball shot, craziest socks or most spirited cheerleader.
- Your Club should provide or secure donated refreshments for everyone attending the rec night.



### **Family Stadium Night**

- Contact your local stadium or professional sports team and organize a Family Stadium Night. Fall sports include basketball, football, hockey, in-line hockey and soccer. Obtain a reduced rate or free tickets to the event in honor of Youth Appreciation Week.
- Arrange for an autograph session with the players after the game.

### **Swim Party**

- Host a Swim Party for young people at a YMCA or sports complex.
- Plan simple games such as a relay swim or an inner-tube race. Bring along some contemporary music and conduct a “crazy” synchronized swimming contest.
- Invite the Red Cross to demonstrate CPR and simple lifesaving techniques at the party.
- Be sure to have a certified lifeguard work the event.

### **Crazy Bowl**

Sponsor a bowling party, but not just any plain ordinary party—Get Crazy! Make a list of 10 “crazy” ways to bowl each frame. For example: facing backward and rolling the ball between your legs; sitting down; using the opposite hand that you normally would; hopping on one foot.

### **Tournament Time!**

- Hold a tournament at a local complex that has ping pong, foosball, basketball, and billiards. Conduct a competition at each station. Invent unique and creative ways to shoot for a basketball shoot out.
- Sponsor an evening at a complex that has go-karts, batting cages, and mini-golf. Compete for the fastest lap on the go-karts, lowest golf scores, or most hits in the batting cages.

### **Lock-In**

- Plan a youth Lock-In, ranging from a few hours to an overnight event.
- Hold the event at a school gym, community center, church or YMCA.
- Activities could include swimming, basketball and volleyball.
- Rent a VCR and have a selection of family movies and popcorn on-hand. Provide snacks and drinks for everyone (consider supplying pizza and setting up a sundae bar).

- Depending on the children’s ages, prepare craft projects and bring along a supply of board games.
- During the Lock-In, Club members should act as chaperons, direct the sports and activities and (of course) help clean up!
- Secure sponsors for donations of merchandise or hold a fund-raiser to purchase items. During the evening, hold drawings to give away the donated items.

### **Youth Fashion Show**

- In conjunction with a local shopping center or department store, coordinate a Youth Fashion Show featuring young people modeling the latest styles.
- Work with a school youth group to secure volunteer models and hold rehearsals during after school hours.
- Choose one or two students to act as announcers for the Youth Fashion Show.
- Request a local beauty salon to donate their services on the day of the show, including hairstyling and makeup application.
- Background music should be provided by students or sponsored by a local radio station or record store.
- Appoint Club members or sub-committees to be responsible for room and stage decoration, lighting and the sound system.
- Your Club may wish to serve or sell cookies, pies, candy and soft drinks after the show.

### **Skating Party**

Organize an ice or roller skating party for community youth. If holding an ice skating party outdoors, serve hot chocolate and have a bonfire (where permissible). Designate people to be on guard and prepared for any ice breaks or fall-ins. Obtain donated items to give away, such as skating passes, fast-food gift certificates, T-shirts or key chains.

### **Youth Appreciation Week Parade**

Plan a special parade for Youth Appreciation Week. Work with other Optimist Clubs or civic organizations in your community in planning this event.

*Here is a brief checklist of things you will want to remember when organizing a parade:*

- Always get permission and cooperation from local authorities.
- Release as much publicity as possible, including press releases, fliers and radio announcements.



- Plan and publicize a detailed parade route outlining distances and dispersal points.
- Arrange for adequate vehicle parking and traffic control with city officials.
- Maintain distances of at least 50 feet between parade units and 200 feet between divisions.

#### *Other parade ideas:*

- Hold a banner contest in advance of the parade at a local school and award prizes.
- Sponsor a contest among grade levels for the most creative float or the most spirited group of walkers (including cheers, noisemakers and clothing).

### **Halftime Entertainment**

The halftime period at a high school football game is a great opportunity to communicate your Optimist Club's commitment to young people and promote upcoming Youth Appreciation Week activities. Consider using this time to recognize athletes with sportsmanship and achievement awards.

## **Service Learning and Leadership Activities**

### **Community Improvement Activity**

During Youth Appreciation Week, choose a day that adults and young people can join forces to achieve something worthwhile for the benefit of the community. This project could be a weekend car wash with proceeds donated to a local charity. Or, your Club could enlist the help of local teens to complete a graffiti paint-out or park beautification project.

### **“Rope” Them Into Leadership**

Take a group of students, or a community youth Club through a ropes or repelling course. These activities build leadership, communication, cooperation skills, and self-esteem.

### **Teens As Problem Solvers**

Assist a group of young people in selecting a school or community-related project to tackle. Serve as a mentor for the “problem-solving” team. Assist with communication skills, goal setting, and group dynamics.

### **Teen-of-the-Month**

- Sponsor a Teen-of-the-Month program that recognizes students for achievement in one or more of the following areas: academics, athletics, religion, leadership development, community involvement, acts of bravery and overcoming physical/mental challenges. Nominations for the award should come from teachers, religious leaders, local youth groups or Optimist members.
- Each selected Teen-of-the-Month will become eligible for your Club's Teen-of-the-Year award. During their tenure as Teen-of-the-Month, winning individuals should be invited to attend an Optimist Club meeting and visit other civic, school and religious groups.

### **Club Meeting For Youth**

- Set aside a Club meeting that falls around Youth Appreciation Week for a special program.
- Invite youngsters and their parents to attend the gathering and make use of the occasion to present youth-oriented speakers and special entertainment.
- This program provides an excellent forum for presenting awards or scholarships.

### **Junior Optimist Octagon International**

- Optimist International supports, as a component of its organization, Junior Optimist Octagon International (JOOI), a youth Club program. Three Club levels, based on membership age, exist within JOOI. These are Alpha Clubs (ages 6 to 9), Junior Optimist Clubs (ages 10 to 13), and Octagon Clubs (ages 14-18).
- As members of a JOOI Youth Club, young people are encouraged and challenged to develop leadership, communication and decision-making skills through voluntary community service. Members are also encouraged, upon reaching adulthood, to continue their community service efforts as the next generation of Optimists. Through volunteer work and service learning, JOOI members are addressing the needs and challenges of today's society as they prepare to become the community leaders of tomorrow.
- You will likely be in direct contact with young people and schools through your Youth Appreciation Week project. Both the planning and activity stages of your program will give you an opportunity to promote JOOI Club building.



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### Youth-In-Religion Day

Religious leaders in most communities are eager to cooperate with Optimist members in recognizing the various phases of positive youth achievement with a Youth-In-Religion Day. In some churches, an entire worship service is planned and conducted by teenagers. Seek the cooperation of the clergy in planning a series of activities centered around local places of worship during Youth Appreciation Week.

### Honor Events and Ceremonies

Host a banquet, luncheon or awards event for special young people. Following are several ideas:

- Honor mentally or physically challenged students.
- Recognize young people who participate in a volunteer program at area nursing homes, hospitals, day care centers or institutions.
- Present “Unsung Hero” awards for students who are outstanding achievers that have not received sufficient recognition for their efforts through existing channels.

For example: Present awards to most improved grades, attitude, ballplayer, band member, etc., or recognize children in early grades. It’s important to start building self-esteem at a young age. Many awards are geared toward high school students and leave out elementary students.

### Sample Proclamation

Ask your town mayor to produce the following proclamation on your project!

*Whereas*, the vast majority of youth are concerned, knowledgeable and responsible citizens, and

*Whereas*, Optimist International has since 1956, developed and promoted a program entitled Youth Appreciation Week, and

*Whereas*, the citizens of (city, county, state, province) have indicated a desire to join the Optimists in expressing appreciation and approval of the contributions of youth, (name and title) therefore proclaims the second week of November as Youth Appreciation Week in (name of city, state, county or province).

*By this action*, let it be known that we have faith in the ability of today’s youth as they assume responsible roles in the future of mankind.