



# Fun, Entertaining, Informative – *NOW*

By Kai Gansner, Director of Member Services



**Y**ou don't need a title to be a leader. That's the title of a book by Mark Sanborn, and Optimist Member JJ Selland operates his

Club with that mentality.

"Everybody feels like they have a sense of ownership in our Club," says Selland, a Member of the Menomonee Falls Optimist Club in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

Anyone in the local Optimist Club can make a positive difference. The key is to seek out and manage the Club's talents and desire. A Member can recruit a new Member, make telephone calls or run technology. Selland says that he has all sorts of skill sets in his Optimist Club.

Selland has been a Member of the Club since 1979 and, according to [www.optimist.org/fivefrogs](http://www.optimist.org/fivefrogs), in the last nine years he has helped "bring out the best" in 1,470 kids. With all of this success, Selland just recently concluded his first term as Club President in September 2009. Why?

"We are so phenomenally successful, because we are all the leaders of our Club," Selland explains.

He mentions the growth of his Club as a byproduct of the quality programs geared toward the youth in the Menomonee Falls area. The Club officers as a group have never repeated since 1979. "We ensure continuity by mentoring the new officers," he says. This makes a huge difference in the respect and direction of the Club. The past President of the Club transitions from the mentality of "past, past, past" to "mentor, mentor, mentor."

Selland talks about how running his Club is a lot of responsibility. He also comments on the way his Club runs meetings. "It's really going about the meetings with direction, leadership and whatever it takes to get people involved," Selland says.

He notes that "the President has to lead the Club and it's everyone else's responsibility to jump on the bandwagon. If you're having a meeting at 7:15 in the morning and all you're serving is coffee, you better put on a good show."

In the litany of Club history, the Menomonee Falls Optimist Club has only sponsored three Clubs – one in 1976, one in 1990 and one in 2004. They focus more on membership. The Club finished the 2008-2009 year adding 17 percent of their membership. The reason for this success directly correlates with a membership drive using elements of the New Optimists Wanted (NOW) program, yet adapting the details to the local community. Selland describes how, to his Club, this event is a big deal. "We use quality, formal paper, and personalize direct invitations." This shows the invitees that the Club has its stuff really well put together. It's about the image of the Club.

Selland mentions that his Club "had three student speakers, and that was the most powerful. Little Haley, at 11 years of age, knocked their socks off."

The testimonials of youth the Club has helped are the best sales pitch Optimists can give. When Optimists ask people to become Members, they are selling the emotion behind a child's smile.

"People like life better when they're happy," Selland says. That's the emotion Clubs want them to leave with, and they keep that emotion active and growing by participating as an Optimist leader in the Club.

*Listen to audio from the interview and get reference material by visiting [www.optimist.org/listen](http://www.optimist.org/listen).*



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