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# Optimist International president urges growth during visit to local clubs

Community boosters in local Optimist Clubs got a special visit on Oct. 27 from their organization's president, who is on a mission to help the organization grow and adapt to modern times.

Optimist International President Dave Bruns was at Camp Heidelberg on Kressler Road last Tuesday to visit a crowd of Optimist members from 80 different clubs in Waterloo Region, London, Guelph and beyond. Several representatives from Wilmot Optimist Clubs were there to meet their organization's current leader.

Bruns, from Topeka, Kansas, just started his one-year term as president of Optimist International and was on a seven-day trip to visit districts across in Quebec, Ontario and Michigan.

His "Growth Surge" tour is looking to spur on a new season of growth for his club, he told the Independent. The international service club aims to grow from its current 75,000 adult members to 100,000 in time for centennial anniversary in 2019, Bruns said. To do that, the service club will have to bring in new members and appeal to younger generations.

"The good news is, I think, young people want to do community service," he said. They



SCOTT MILLER CRESSMAN, INDEPENDENT STAFF

Dave Bruns (third from right), president of Optimist International, met with local Optimists from the Petersburg, Wilmot and Mannheim clubs.

are already heavily involved, he said, citing the volunteering requirements for high school graduation. Those younger people engage differently than how the Optimist Clubs operate, but that can change.

"We need to be able to adapt to modern society," Bruns said.

"I don't think we need to throw out the old model... but we need to create the new."

The new president's tour was also promoting the Optimists' new Oratorical World Championships, an international finals for youth under 18 years old who win local speech contests. The new World Championships will happen June

23 and 24 in St. Louis, Missouri.

On last week's visit, the president got to meet and encourage hundreds of local Optimists who are usually too busy working on grassroots projects to spend time at the organization's higher levels: "This is my opportunity to meet the people who are doing the service and helping the kids," he explained.

"I really think we need service organizations more today than ever before," Bruns added, because kids in both Canada and the US are facing increased pressure from society and need positive outlets to grow and develop.

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