

White Paper Report – Written by John Grover, President, Grand Strand Optimist Club  
(Myrtle Beach, SC)

Speaker - John Grover

White Paper Report

In 2011-2012, while serving as President Elect of our club, the current President and I realized our club had serious financial problems. Recognizing that, and working with our Board members, he and I spent the better part of that year successfully rebuilding our finances, to the extent that when I became President this was not an issue. That proved to be welcome news as it allowed me to move in the direction I had initially wanted when I agreed to run for President Elect and eventually President.

Upon attending the International Convention in Milwaukee last year my focus was on learning about member retention more so than adding new members. I asked others in my position who were attending their thoughts on this and found a common thread among us. Retention became my focus, and I've been fortunate enough to have a Board that concurs with me. A side note to this is our belief that member retention creates new member opportunities and this has proven true.

To retain members you have to establish a sense of pride in who your members are as individuals and in knowing what they bring to the club in terms of time, talent and treasure. My goal was and still is to convince every member they have a talent or talents that revolve around the giving of their personal time, their skills and the knowledge they've obtained over the years, and the financial commitments they can make to support the fundraising and social efforts of their club, with our end result being our love of and help for children.

To do this I held my first Board meeting in September 2012, prior to any Board members taking office. I compiled a list of over 40 activities our club had participated in over the last few years. What I found was an organization that had done many things well throughout their years, but had settled into accepting repetition rather than creativity as the norm. At that meeting we determined which activities on the list we could and should address that would maintain or create our sense of pride, and then discussed new activities to retain our members. We wanted to create a sense of increased pride through developing new projects and activities.

Our first step was to determine how well known we were in our community. We found out we were known, but the reality was we were the best kept secret in town. Knowing this I created a Media Director position, developed a direction for the position which involved newspaper and television, and moved forward on this immediately. To date we have been successful beyond my wildest dreams. We have a photo centered on our weekly meetings in the paper almost every week. When we run special events we are able to get an interview with one or more of the local TV stations. Some of our most

newsworthy new events were our Gears, Grapes and Gowns fundraiser, combining a car show, wine tasting and fashion show, and our Operation Unity program, whereby 21 members volunteered to sand and paint the local handicapped playground bearing the name Grand Strand Optimist Club Playground at the minor league ballpark of the Myrtle Beach Pelicans back in May. Issac Bailey, our local Sun News columnist wrote a wonderful article on the OI Oratorical Contest. All of this was designed to let our community know Optimism is alive and well in their community, supported by many volunteers sincerely interested in helping their children.

To date we have been highly successful in spreading the word on Optimism. We are more than just a club in our community. We're developing a face to go with the name, and a heart to go with our checks. The Grand Strand Optimist Club hasn't changed the world, but we have made subtle positive changes to our part of it.