

Soroptimist® International of the Americas
98th Southern Region Conference
Peach Tree City, Georgia
Friday, April 19, 2024.

#SOROPTIMISTSTRONG

The following workshops began at 2:00 p.m.

Book Club “The Last Thing He Told Me” - lead Governor Elect Barbara Spyke

After discussion a virtual book club would be established; with Daphne Boswell (SI Tuscaloosa) and Pat McKay (Parliamentarian and SI Huntsville) offered to coordinate.

Simplify Your Secretary Role - presented by Gail Reinfeld (Southern Region Secretary and SI Davie)

How to Write a Winning Grant - presented by Mary Anna Giordano (SI Davie President Elect)

How to Treasure Being a Treasurer - presented by Denise Held (SI Homestead)

“My Trip to Africa” - presented by Michelle Strawser (Southern Region Past Governor, Membership Chair and SI Tampa)

Workshops adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

The evening of April 19, 2024 began with Welcome First Timers’ party. Followed with a Murder Mystery party for all attendees.

Gail Reinfeld
Secretary, SIA - Southern Region
Approved March 5, 2025

Soroptimist® International of the Americas
98th Southern Region Conference
Peach Tree City, Georgia
April 20 and 21, 2024.

#SOROPTIMISTSTRONG
98th Southern Region Conference

The meeting was called to order 9:15 a.m., Saturday, April 20, 2024 by Governor Kathy Blanton.

Note: Presidents' meeting conducted from 8:15 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and Delegates briefing was conducted from 8:45 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance.

State of the Region, Governor Kathy Blanton provided highlights of Soroptimist history from its beginnings in 1921 with its first chartered club, in Alameda County, Oakland, California. The first meeting was an open forum led by our first club President, Violet Richardson.

About 10 years ago, the mission statement for Soroptimist International was created and stated: "We are Soroptimist. A global volunteer organization that provides women and girls with access to education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment. Also, at that time, Soroptimist created dream programs.

Governor Blanton presented an overview of the Southern Region area. It encompassed five states with 13 clubs (and soon to be Pasco County, Florida) - Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia - and is part of the Soroptimist International of the Americas.

SIA now has 1,300 clubs. It is only one of the five federations of Soroptimist International. There are four other federations worldwide - Europe, Great Britain and Ireland, South West Pacific and Africa.

There were now 121 countries where Soroptimist clubs can be found.

Club updates were presented by the following Club Presidents/Designees:

- District I: Davie, Mary Anna Giordano; SI Homestead, Adrienne Griffiths; The Palm Beaches, Cathy Iho
- District II: Greater Daytona Beaches, Virgie Davie; St. Lucie, Kathy Blanton; Stuart, Mary Ann Searle; Tampa, Lorraine Lundy
- District III: Huntsville, Carolgene Williams; Tuscaloosa, Caroline Williams and Daphne Boswell; Music City Nashville, Cheryl Bradley

Presentations:

Reaching Higher Together presented by SIA Director Deborah Mackes

Ms. Mackes stated for 2022 - 2023 there had been 13 Clubs in Southern Region. She provided the following information about the Region: 763 volunteer hours, a total of \$55,200 donated in club awards, 29 club level awards and five new members.

She stated because of dedication and commitment Soroptimist would be moving closer to achieving their Big Goal of helping half a million women and girls achieve economic empowerment through access to education by 2031. Together, SIA has been providing more Dream Awards to women, mentoring more girls through Dream It, Be It, and providing even more opportunities for empowerment through Big Goal Accelerator projects. This past year, SIA helped nearly 59,000 women and girls through projects that work towards hitting the Big Goal.

SIA is embarking on a technology transformation to help revolutionize the operations, increasing brand exposure and organizational growth. New tools included an innovative database to store information with stronger security, a state-of-the-art member portal to communicate with each other and a new Soroptimist website.

Last year, SIA distributed nearly \$3 million in Live Your Dream awards and more than \$700,000 in Big Goal Accelerator program scholarships- which helped thousands of women. She stated members should take advantage of tools to achieve their own dreams as “together, we will reach higher.”

Soroptimist would continue to work as leaders in the fight for a gender-equality, where all women and girls could pursue their dreams of education, where women and girls would achieve economic empowerment, where they create a wave of change that shapes not just themselves but also their families and communities for the better.

Ms. Mackes stated “empowered women help empower women.”

She added SIA provided the winning regional Live Your Dream recipient a \$5,000 award. Further, should the clubs in region provide awards to at least 30 Live Your Dream recipients, SIA would provide an additional \$3,000 to the regional recipient (total of \$8,000).

Ms. Mackes concluded by stating “let us dare to dream higher together.”

Transactional to Engaging Membership Model presented by Membership Chair/Past Governor Michelle Strawser

Ms. Strawser stated a new club had been chartered in District II, Pasco County, Florida for the new program year. She recognized those new Pasco County club members in attendance at the conference.

Ms. Strawser stated SIA is evolving to be more engaging and their technology is evolving

She stated there has been a shift in SIA over the past several years and shared engagement opportunities. They have been discussing civility, offering more webinars and on-demand training on various topics, introduced a Leadership Round Table, launched the two-year Soroptimist Leadership Fellows Program, introduced micro-learning opportunities on social media via the #LeadtoAchieve campaign, began work on a member code of conduct, hosted fun member engagement activities, such as the International Women's day tea and the wrap

yourself in love event, and got more active on a global level by hosting a parallel event at Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Commission for Status Women (CSW).

She stated it was all about engagement. Data has taught that in order to attract new members and retain the members; it was needed to become a more engaging organization and heighten the operations.

Training has been made available to develop members to continue leading in SIA; effectively developing the next generation of SIA's leaders.

Member engagement activities being offered at the federation, region and club levels makes Soroptimist fun and help deepen connectivity with one another. Without engagement and an exceptional member experience, SIA would eventually cease to exist. She called to action each member to take advantage of all SIA offers.

Ms. Strawser described the newly created member portal. She encouraged members to register to access the software called TechTalks Learning Labs via the distributed QR code at each table or at tech@soroptimist.org

Big Goal Accelerator Projects Deep Dive presented by Program Chair Teri Matlach

Ms. Matlach explained big goal accelerator projects were to access education through formal education. She stated the goal would be to empower at least 500,000 women and girls to live their dreams.

She described what was meant by education. She stated education would be to increase ability to access formal education. This training would result in a credential. It could also provide something which could improve skills or circumstances; such as being more able to access formal education or economic empowerment.

Specifically, these projects work with women or girls facing obstacles, increase/provide access to formal education, would be Soroptimist-led, would not be a Dream Program and are reported through the official reporting link. Projects must meet all five criteria.

She stated some clubs offered items to the community that were focused on raising awareness or educational training; such as sharing information about healthy relationships and women's health or trafficking. This would not be the same as access to formal education. It may be helpful, but it was not focused on education or economic empowerment.

Eligible project categories include: scholarship education awards directly to a girl; providing necessary items, such as a laptop to a women or girl who has not received a Live Your Dream award; classes focused on job skills, college interviews and how to dress; computer training and career mentorship.

Some examples of not eligible categories include: awareness raising projects; beautification of space; general social empowerment; projects not serving women or girls facing obstacles,

donations to other organizations, new laptop to Live Your Dream awards recipients; workshops on signs of human trafficking; and prom dress giveaway.

The completed big goal accelerator online reporting form would be due to SIA by June 30.

Ms. Matlach concluded by stating, “let’s work together to reach our big goal”.

Next, Governor Blanton presented gifts of appreciation to Club Presidents.

Recess for morning break from 10:15 a.m. to 10:35 a.m.

Dream It, Be It Ideas for Success presented by District II Director Wanda Moore
Ms. Moore informed members a binder had been created with tips for a successful DIBI program and a program checklist. She described the contents of the binder which included training requirements, a planning toolkit, templates for letters of partnerships and sponsorships, a parental consent and release form, flyers, curriculum guide, evaluation form and sample certificates.

Human Trafficking: Empowering Survivors presented by Kasey McClure – 4Sarah Founder
Kasey McClure

Ms. McClure provided an overview of events throughout her life that impacted the formation of the 4Sarah organization. She described the 4Sarah organization as a survivor-led non-profit, faith-based organization that provides support and assistance for positive lifetime change for women and girls involved in the sex industry. She elaborated on the outreach program, care team program, transitioning, short term assessment home for pregnant women or women with children and the scholarship program.

Governor Blanton provided Ms. McClure with a gift and stated Ms. McClure had been a 2012 Live Your Dream recipient.

“Live Your Dream” Award Ceremony

Live Your Dream Chair Skye Kent Burnett (SI Tuscaloosa) stated there had been over 200 applicants and 36 Live Your Dream awards this past year with \$55,000 awarded.

- Ms. Burnett introduced Southern Region’s award recipient Ms. Rana Dhory.
- Wanda Moore (Southern Region District II Director and SI Daytona) introduced SI Daytona’s recipient for 2023 - 2024, Ms. Chelsea Harris, from Peachtree City, Georgia.
Ms. Moore stated Ms. Harris would become a member of the Peachtree City Club when chartered.

Lunch break from 11:50 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

“Giving Back is the Rent You Pay for the Space You Occupy!” presented by Tiffany Tolbert - Program Director at Computopt

Ms. Tolbert described her non-profit program Computopt and her motto “giving back is the rent you pay for the space you occupy.” She explained her personal philosophy and stated she was a firm believer that “you never set yourself on fire to keep others warm.”

Decoding Decision-Making: Insights into SIA’s Organizational Dynamics and Stakeholder Engagement Strategies presented by SIA Director Deborah Mackes

Ms. Mackes described the difference between strategic and working boards, SIA’s foundation/history, how decisions were made at SIA and the role of stakeholder engagement.

She emphasized the importance of each member’s voice and stated there were several ways to effectively share your voice. The most important one was voting on club, region and board leadership. Another opportunity to vote was at the convention during the general meeting via club delegates. The other way to have voices count was via multiple annual surveys from SIA. And lastly, members should reach out to SIA Headquarters to provide feedback and suggestions on how SIA could improve.

In closing, Ms. Mackes stated the key take aways from this session were:

- SIA has a strategic board responsible for setting the direction of SIA and monitoring its progress and resources,
- SIA’s Board of Directors were representatives “OF” and not “FOR” the entire membership and followed that thought process when making decisions. Their goal was to make decisions for the good of the SIA as a whole, all of its members, and the women and girls served,
- SIA headquarters staff were there to implement decisions and, via the direction of the Executive Director/CEO, were responsible for SIA’s daily operations,
- the importance of member engagement and making members voice heard.

Ms. Mackes announced Michelle Strawser would be an incoming SIA Board Director.

Tools and Tech for Fundraising in Your Community presented by Fundraising Chair Marie Kennedy

Ms. Kennedy acknowledged and thanked Judy Calland, SI Music City Nashville and Marie Rizzi, SI Davie for their generous matching funds for Dream Big. She added members could invest in women and girls by becoming a “stargazer” for as little as \$5 per month.

Ms. Kennedy explored how members could be a “Guiding Star” by learning how to fundraise in local communities, along with resources and tools for success.

She stated fundraising could be uncomfortable and provided the following suggestions:

- involve friends and family in your “why” of being part of SIA,
- build confidence through “opening the door” for our mission in your community to fundraise locally and through your networks,

- social media was one of the easiest ways to share the mission of Soroptimist. There were many platforms, such as, Facebook, Instagram or X to start a fundraiser and share the love of Soroptimist and support the mission. Also, help direct potential new supporters to SIA's donation page to explore the content of LiveYourDream.org. The link to SIA's donation page or QR code could be used rather than creating a fundraiser through the social media platform,
- start a local fundraiser and work with restaurants to donate a percentage of sales to Clubs,
- become a Star Gazer. Close to \$800,000 has been raised through this program and almost \$1 million has been raised with the Star Gazer program and Laurel Society,
- make Soroptimist the charity of choice,
- partner with business with a purpose, corporate responsibility, foundation programs, matching funds

Recess from 2:25 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.

Membership Panel lead by District III Director Kacie Obradovich

Panel members: Skye Kent Burnett, Tuscaloosa; Jennifer Maricle, Tuscaloosa; Diana Jones, Pasco County and Adrienne Griffitts, Homestead and Alexandra Zalis, Davie;

The members of the panel discussed:

- why they joined,
- what has been done to increase membership,
- other options to join other organizations,
- tips for retention or engagement,
- their successes,
- age range of new members,
- making members feel important or engaged

Marketing Tips to Elevate Your Club Events to New Heights presented by Governor Elect Barbara Spyke

Governor Elect Barbara Spyke discussed the following marketing tips:

- use FaceBook's event page,
- use event hash tags (hashtag with @ in the comment section to post for all followers)
- use the Canva app,
- use branding tools,
- use SIA templates, logos and fonts for media,
- engage local media,
- co-host with other organizations,
- incorporate photos,
- post event activities,
- recap and evaluate to get ready for next event,
- toot your own horn

Voting by Conference Delegates and Board Members

Consent Agenda

Motion to approved the consent agenda made by Carolgene Williams, seconded by Yvette Doherty. In a voice vote all Delegates and Board Members present voted in favor to approve the consent agenda. There were no objections. Passed unanimously.

2024 - 2026 Officers

Nominations opened. Nominations closed, as there were no other nominations.

Motion made by Caroline Williams, seconded by Cathy Iho to approved the uncontested three candidates by acclamation (Governor Elect, Kacie Obradovich; Treasurer, Denise Held and Secretary, Gail Reinfeld). In a voice vote, all present voted in favor to approve the new Officers for 2024 - 2026. There were no objections. Passed unanimously.

2024 - 2026 District Director Vote by Ballot

District I: Kathi Pease (elected unopposed)

District II: Wanda Moore

Deborah Wilde (elected by majority vote)

District III: Daphne Howell (elected unopposed)

Officers and Directors for 2024 - 2026:

Governor: Barbara Spyke (SI St. Lucie)

Governor Elect: Kacie Obradovich (SI Tuscaloosa)

Treasurer: Denise Held (SI Homestead)

Secretary: Gail Reinfeld (SI Davie)

District I: Kathi Pease (SI The Palm Beaches)

District II: Deborah Wilde (SI Stuart)

District III: Daphne Howell (SI Music City Nashville)

Credentials Report:

Past Governor Patricia McCay presented the credentials report comprised of 12 clubs in the region (five clubs in District I, four clubs in District II and three clubs in District III).

Ten clubs were represented at the conference; three clubs in District I, four clubs in District II and three clubs in District III.

Presidents	9
Delegates	16
Board Members	6
Total Voting	31

Non-Voting Soroptimists	20
Official Federation Visitor	1
Federation Guest(s)	1
Guest(s) (Soroptimists)	1
Guest(s) (Non-Soroptimists)	8

Total Attendees 62

As there were no objections to accept the credentials report as presented, the credentials report was approved.

Ruby Lee Minar RLM Secretary Teri Matlach convened their Annual Board Meeting at 4:00 p.m.

Committee Chairs

Governor Elect Barbara Spyke shared the following filled Committee Chairs:

Laws and Resolutions, Patricia McCay; Regional Conference, Yvette Doherty; Human Trafficking, Patricia McCay; Membership/New Clubs, Michelle Strawser; Live Your Dream, Wanda Moore; Membership Recruitment, Adrienne Griffitt; and Dream It, Be It, Elizabeth Seymore and Jeanne Sherwood.

Governor Elect Barbara Spyke stated vacant Committee Chairs included the following Committees: Nominating, Program, Fundraising, Public Awareness, Membership Retention, and Conference Awards.

As there was other business, the meeting recessed at 4:30 p.m., Saturday, April 20, 2024

The evening of April 20, 2024 began with the Laurel Society Reception by invitation (5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.) followed by the Installation Gala dinner starting at 6:00 p.m.

SIA Director Deborah Mackes led the recognition of outgoing 2022 - 2024 Southern Region Board of Officers and District Directors; followed by the installation of the new 2024 - 2026 Officers and District Directors (with Kathi Pease absent).

Patricia McCay, SI Huntsville and Region Chair for Alicia Zachman Emerging Leader announced Elizabeth Seymore and Jeanne Sherwood of SI Homestead were selected as the recipients of the Alicia Zachman Emerging Leader award. She presented Ms. Seymore and Ms. Sherwood each with a certificate and a trophy.

Meeting reconvened 9:00 a.m. Sunday, April 21, 2024.

Celebration of Life - Hosted by SI Stuart, Mary Ann Searle (President of SI Stuart)

District I, SI Davie members Mary Anna Giordano and Alexandra Zalis, joined by Davie members Marie Rizzi and Gail Reinfeld, led a memorial tribute for Helene Ditter and Virginia Gabriel, two Southern Region members who passed since the 97th SR conference.

Announcements, Raffles and Awards

Announcements

Governor Blanton announced the following dates and locations of the next District meetings: District I and II in Boca Raton, Florida and District III in Nashville, Tennessee.

Also announced was the next Southern Region (99th) conference for May 1 - 4, 2025 in Deerfield Beach, Florida. Governor Elect Barbara Spyke mentioned an optional four-day cruise may be organized the Monday after the District III meeting.

Ms. Mackes thanked attendees for helping her have a great time at the conference and stated her heart was full.

Gift Raffle Winners

Daphne Boswell, Skye Kent Burnett, Cheryl Bradley, Beth Gibbs, Megan Sheriff and Jeanne Sherwood were raffle winners.

Awards

Governor Kathy Blanton presented certificates to the following clubs in five winning categories:

- Attendance – SI Tuscaloosa
- Facebook – SI St. Lucie
- Membership Gain – SI Tuscaloosa
- Mileage – SI Homestead
- Website – SI Stuart

Marie Kennedy, Past Governor and Laurel Society member announced Beth Gibbs, SI Tuscaloosa, was selected as the Laurel Society member. She presented Ms. Gibbs with a Dream Big pin and stated the Laurel Society pin would be forthcoming.

Governor Blanton provided special recognition to Club Presidents, Conference and Region Chairs, member presenters, moderators of conference sessions, coordinators of special activities and all members that fulfilled a specific function during the conference.

After the Soroptimist Pledge, as there was no further business the 98th Soroptimist Southern Region Conference meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m., Sunday, April 21, 2024.

Post conference evaluations were completed and submitted by attendees.

Gail Reinfeld

Secretary, SIA - Southern Region

Approved March 5, 2025