



A global volunteer organization that economically empowers women and girls by providing access to education, the single most effective anti-poverty intervention.

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF THE AMERICAS

45th Biennial Convention Recap

It was a memorable, inspiring and colorful time in Yokohama, Japan. We are grateful to our Japanese hosts for their outstanding hospitality and thank all of the attendees who made this a convention we will never forget!

The theme of this year's convention was "Stars, Dreams and Wishes," which had a symbolic relationship to the Japanese culture. Each year since 755, Japan has celebrated the reunion of Orihime, the weaver star and patron of silk farming, and Hikoboshi, the cowherd star and agricultural messenger. The Milky Way separates the lovers who can only meet once a year. In Japan, the lovers' reunion is celebrated by Tanabata or Star Festival, every July or August. The Japanese write their hopes and wishes on long colorful strips of paper, which create beautiful displays of multi-color streamers placed upon trees.

Similarly, Soroptimists in our 21 countries and territories only have the opportunity to meet face-to-face every two years. So for one week more than 2,500 Soroptimists came together to celebrate our stars, explore our dreams and make wishes for the future.

The convention paid homage to another Japanese tradition as well—the haiku, a traditional form of Japanese poetry. Prior to convention, members had the opportunity to submit their own haikus. Some even received the chance to read their poems on stage, while other haikus were featured at various sessions throughout the week.

Attendees also had the opportunity to dress in kimonos, learn calligraphy and partake in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony.

[HAIKUS: Read some of these amazing pieces of art](#)

[See photos of Japanese cultural experiences](#)

Writing Our Wishes Reception

The convention kicked off with the "Writing Our Wishes Reception." Attendees were invited to write their wishes on streamers, which were then hung on the Soroptimist Tanabatas trees that stood throughout convention in the exhibit hall. By the end of the week, SIA's Tanabata trees were dressed in a rainbow of color and inspiring messages for women and girls.

Soroptimist leaders—Renata Trottmann Probst, President of Soroptimist International of Europe; Sue Williams, President-elect of Soroptimist International of Great Britain & Ireland; and Anusha Santhirasthipam, President of Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific—shared greetings of friendship and goodwill from their federations. And attendees enjoyed a special performance by legendary Japanese movie, television and stage actress, Michiko Godai, who leaves of legacy of drawing attention to the many challenges that women and girls have faced throughout history. The festivities ended with live music by the Yokohama Jazz band.

[See Writing Our Wishes event photos](#)

[Read Federation Welcome Messages](#)

We All Look at the Same Sky General Session

In Japan there is saying, “We all look at the same sky,” which means that even though we come from different countries and cities, when we lift our heads upward, we all see the same moon, stars and sky. This session celebrated our differences as Soroptimists—we may hail from 21 different countries and territories, speak six different languages and practice many customs—but we all have the same desire to help women and girls. The prideful Salute to Nations recognized each of the nations in our federation in a visual media presentation, while designated flag bearers placed the flags of SIA, the United States (home of our President Dawn Marie Lemonds), Japan (host country) and SI (our parent organization) on the stage. Convention had officially begun!

SI President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen spoke about her efforts to advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and shared photos from her visits to many Soroptimist projects throughout the four federations.

The Soroptimists Celebrating Success and Membership Awards were also presented to clubs and regions.

[See We All Look at the Same Sky photos](#)

Governance Session

The Governance Discussion brought convention delegates together to discuss two major topics:

1. The move from a system of mailed paper ballots, which we currently have, to one with online/electric voting.
2. Who should vote for board members—should all clubs in good standing vote for all SIA Board members or just clubs in the candidate’s electoral area (as it currently is now)?

Attendees received background info about both of these topics and delegates were encouraged to provide feedback and input on behalf their clubs. The conversation on these topics will continue and SIA will provide more info to clubs in the future. Stay tuned!

Laurel Society Celebration

The exclusive Laurel Society event is SIA's opportunity to celebrate, honor and give back to its top donors who give so much to our Dream Programs. Each Laurel Society party always tops the last. This year's soiree was themed after a 1960s era night club, based on the interesting fact that in the 1960s and 70s Yokohama was the gateway to the rest of Japan for international music and fashion. Laurel Society members donned vintage attire and enjoyed a night of music, dancing, entertainment, food and libations.

[See Laurel Society event photos](#)

Our Wishes for the Future General Session

This session was all about the federation—where we are and where we hope to go. It was noted that as we prepare for our second century, we need to take stock of the changing environment. We also need to increase our collective impact, become better known, attract more members and secure more financial support.

Executive Director & CEO Elizabeth Lucas gave her headquarters report on the state of our organization and how we can get to the future we all envision. This informative presentation was followed by our Finance Report, delivered by SIA Secretary Treasurer Kathy King. This report shared our financial picture, including our FY16/17 financial results and our financial strategy to serve even more women and girls.

Thinking about our future leads us to a presentation on our next Big Goal. As an organization we picked "Invest in the dreams of half a million women and girls through access to education" as our 2021-2031 Big Goal. More specifically we hope to empower 60,000 women and girls through the *Live Your Dream Awards* and empower 440,000 girls through *Dream It, Be It*. As SIA continues to gather member feedback to shape this goal, attendees met in small groups by language to identify strengths and opportunities to build our capacity and reach our next Big Goal.

One member, Diane Thompson, has been a great strength in helping ensure that meeting our Big Goal is a possibility—for that we greatly thank Diane! A member of SI/Butler County, PA (North Atlantic Region), a past region governor and past SIA Board Member, Diane launched a matching program in North Atlantic Region at last year's region conference, where she pledged to match up to \$50,000 in donations to the Dream Programs made by her fellow North Atlantic Region members. In an effort to inspire others to give, Diane encouraged attendees to dream big, to mobilize around our organization and to support our programs.

[Download Diane's inspiring presentation](#)

[Download Headquarters Report \(ENGLISH\)](#) [Download Headquarters Report \(JAPANESE\)](#)

[Download Finance Report](#)

Reach for the Stars General Session

This session welcomed keynote speaker Fumiko Hayashi, Mayor of Yokohama, who provided words of wisdom, insights on global issues affecting women and girls and the magic of education in leveling the

playing field. A well-respected leader—both in Japan and internationally—Mayor Hayashi has received several world-class rewards and honors, including the *Wall Street Journal's* “50 Women to Watch,” *Forbes* magazine’s “World’s 100 Most Powerful Women,” *Fortune* magazine’s “50 Most Powerful Women in Business: International” and “Person of the Year” from the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan.

Following the mayor’s address 2018-2019 SIA President Elizabeth spoke about the Dream Programs and their alignment with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Of the U.N.s 17 goals and 169 targets, our Dream Programs directly support five goals and 12 targets. Those goals are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere,

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Our Shining Stars Recognition Banquet

The recognition banquet pays tribute to the women who have worked tirelessly to make Soroptimist the best it can be, and who have paved the way for the next group of leaders. But it is also a fun evening to spend with Soroptimist friends while eating a delicious dinner and enjoying the entertainment. The evening began with a stunning cultural performance by the Noh Theatre, arranged by Rokuro Gensho Umewaka, a world-famous Noh actor who has been designated by the Japan government as a “Living National Treasure.” The performance, very unique to Japanese culture, featured traditional dance and instruments. After dinner we recognized our dedicated leadership:

2017-2018 Fundraising Council Members

- Fundraising Council Chair Tracy Scala—Avon, Connecticut, USA
- Ohran Choe—Daegu, Korea
- Lee Ann Cochran—Bay Village, Ohio, USA
- Kelly Fogarty—Manhattan Beach, California
- Paloma de Papa—Marakina City, Philippines

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- Fundraising Council Chair Lee Ann Cochran—Bay Village, Ohio, USA
- Kelly Fogarty—Manhattan Beach, California
- Dona Gaddis Wolf—Pittsburgh, California
- Susan Gilbey—Westminster, California
- Tracy Scala—Avon, Connecticut, USA

2016-2018 Region Governors

- America del Sur Region—Gladys Garcia-Ojeda
- Brazil Region—Jane Carol Azevedo
- Camino Real Region—Ginger Cole
- Desert Coast Region—Susan Gilbey
- Eastern Canada Region—Jean Skilman
- Founder Region—Pamela Parker
- Golden West Region—Penny Babb
- Japan Chuo Region—Yoshie Oshima
- Japan Higashi Region—Michiko Murakami
- Japan Kita Region—Teruko Takada
- Japan Minami Region—Mihoko Ohta
- Japan Nishi Region—Yukiko Kaneko
- Korea Region—Hyochul Shin
- Mexico/Centroamerica Region—Elys Paniza
- Midwestern Region—Vivian Walczesky
- North Atlantic Region—Tammy Klotzbach
- North Central Region—Mary Anne Prinkkila Rogers
- Northeastern Region—Ann Day
- Northwestern Region—Stephanie Smith
- Philippines Region—Ma. Rosario "Cherry" Tumaneng
- Rocky Mountain Region—LaDaun Ryan
- Sierra Nevada Region—Vicki Watson
- Sierra Pacific—Tana Elizondo
- South Atlantic Region—Amy Harman
- South Central Region—Cindy Lindley
- Southern Region—Denise Held
- Taiwan Region, 2017-2018—Yueh-Hung Lu-Yu
- Western Canada Region—Rita MacKenzie

2018-2020 Region Governors

- America del Sur Region—Maria Odette Nassif De Val
- Brazil Region—Sonia Maria Da Silva Loyola
- Camino Real Region—Ana Marie LeNoue
- Desert Coast Region—Laurel Lanham
- Eastern Canada Region—Tanna Edwards
- Founder Region—Sylvia Crafton
- Golden West Region—Lori Reed
- Japan Chuo Region—Teruko Miyawaki
- Japan Higashi Region—Yoko Ishimoto
- Japan Kita Region—Chihiro Kon
- Japan Minami Region—Sachiko Suzuki
- Japan Nishi Region—Taka Kobayashi

- Korea Region—Jungmi Lim
- Mexico/Centroamerica Region—Sandra Kieswetter De Halkema
- Midwestern Region—Kristine Armstrong
- North Atlantic Region—Peggy Gentile-Van Meter
- North Central Region—Lexi Isaacson
- Northeastern Region—Ruby Fresneda
- Northwestern Region—Marti Crook
- Philippines Region—Lydia Co
- Rocky Mountain Region—Rita Offrett
- Sierra Nevada Region—Lane Parks
- Sierra Pacific Region—Gail Dekreon
- South Atlantic Region—Deborah Mackes
- South Central Region—Jennifer Reeves
- Southern Region—Caroline Williams
- Taiwan Region (2018-2019)—Lin-Mei Shen-Tan
- Western Canada Region—Melanie Kenny

2017-2018 Board of Directors

- President Dawn Marie Lemonds—Tustin, California, USA
- President-elect Elizabeth Di Geronimo—Caracas, Venezuela
- Secretary/Treasurer Kathy King—Klamath Falls, Oregon, USA
- Laws and Resolutions Chair Karen Cromer Johnson—Eagan, Minnesota, USA
- Julieta Armendariz de Lopez—Tijuana, Mexico
- Bonnie Domochuk—Cambridge, Ontario, Canada
- Nobuko Fujii—Ehime-ken, Japan
- Minda Garcia—Mandaluyong City, Philippines
- Heidi McNamar—Westbrook, Connecticut, USA
- Sherry Pearson—Los Banos, California, USA
- Michiko Shoji—Ebina, Japan
- Mariza Schuster Bueno—Rio Negro, Brazil
- Toshiko Ryomoto—Osaka, Japan
- Tina Wei-Kang Pan—Taipei, Taiwan

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- Julieta Armendariz de Lopez—Tijuana, Mexico
- Jane Carol Azavedo—Brasilia, Brazil
- Penny Babb—Peoria, Arizona, USA
- Ohran Choe—Daegu, Korea

- Robin Davis—Alexandria, Virginia, USA
- Bonnie Domonchuk—Cambridge, Ontario, Canada
- Minda Garcia—Mandaluyong City, Philippines
- Margo Hartman—Scottsbluff, Nebraska, USA
- Hisako Mishima—Kitakyusyu, Japan
- Sherry Pearson—Los Banos, California, USA
- Michiko Shoji—Ebina, Japan
- Toshiko Ryomoto—Osaka, Japan

To our outgoing leaders: *Thank you for everything you've done for Soroptimist, including the significant changes you've helped SIA make over the past two years. And thank you for your dedicating to helping the women and girls we serve!*

Dawn Marie Lemond's Closing Address

2017-2018 SIA President Dawn Marie Lemonds also shared her gratitude for her family, new and old Soroptimist friends, the SIA staff, region leaders, the members, and the women and girls we support. She challenges all members and clubs to:

- **BE the club** people want to join.
- **Be welcoming.**
- **Be relevant to our mission, to your community and world,**
- **Extend the gift** of membership extravagantly.
- **Make a space for new members** to contribute and celebrate your accomplishments.
- **Ensure membership is joy-filled**—and give us a sense of contribution and satisfaction with our results.
- **Live the Dream** of helping women and girls live theirs, each of us has to be an engaged member responsible for learning and growing, and being a positive change agent when necessary.

[VIDEO: Watch Dawn Marie's full speech](#)

Elizabeth di Geronimo's Welcome Address

2018-2019 SIA President Elizabeth di Geronimo asked Soroptimists to focus on our Dream Programs. The Dream Programs are our best opportunity to unite all 21 countries and territories globally by enhancing our branding and recognition and helping us meet our Big Goal.

Elizabeth introduced the following hashtag: **#SpotlightSoroptimist** and encourages clubs to use this hashtag on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to show everything you do to support women and girls through our Dream Programs. For example, post updates on how your club is raising money for Dream Programs. Post a picture of a *Live Your Dream Award* recipient (if she is okay with it) meeting your club members. Post announcements about your *Dream It, Be It* program. Or post pictures from a *Dream It, Be It* event you support. And every time you do that, please include the hashtag: **#SpotlightSoroptimist** with your post.

This helps us tell the world how much we are doing and lets other people join the conversation. It also helps us call on other activists around the world and mobilizes people around issues relevant to our members.

[VIDEO: Watch Elizabeth's full speech](#)

[See photos from Our Shining Stars Recognition Banquet](#)

Making Dreams Come True General Session

No convention would be complete without the celebration of our *Live Your Dream Award* recipients. Thanks to our major partner, Torrid, all three recipients were able to join us in Yokohama. Not only did Torrid cover the cost for them to fly from the United States, Mexico and Canada, they also provided each of the recipients with several outfits from the Torrid collection. The three brave and inspiring women shared their incredible stories of perseverance and had the opportunity to meet many of the Soroptimist members.

Shamayel, of the United States, is originally from Afghanistan. She grew up in a city where the Taliban used violence and intimidation to prevent girls from attending school. After her parents died trying to help these girls, the U.S. government granted Shamayel immediate asylum to save her from being the next target. Once here, she was able to find local support to bring her siblings to the U.S. and serves as their caregiver while attending college fulltime.

Ana Caren, of Mexico, grew up in a home where physical abuse was the norm. Her parents suffered from mental illness and drug abuse, and Ana Caren was constantly moving between her family house and her grandparents'. Sometimes she had to beg on the street. That did not stop her from working toward her dream of finishing school. But when her mother died, Ana Caren's dream was put on hold, as she became the caretaker for her three little brothers. This award represents a brighter future for Ana Caren and she can work toward her dream once again.

Lucia, of Canada, endured many years of abuse. Her ex—the father of her children—was a drug addict who would stop at nothing to manipulate, brutalize and psychologically abuse her. Feeling worthless, useless and unworthy, Lucia did not see an end in sight. But she finally found the strength and courage to leave him and her life of abuse behind. Though she continues to struggle daily with post-traumatic stress, this single mother is determined to make a better life for herself and her two young children.

[See photos of Live Your Dream Award recipients wearing Torrid collection](#)

[See photos from the Making Dreams Come True General Session](#)

Club and Region Recognition

Several clubs and regions were recognized for their for their tremendous efforts to advance SIA's strategic plan. Congratulations to the following clubs and regions for a successful year and a job well-done!

Soroptimists Celebrating Success

- Fundraising

- First Place: SI/Corona, Golden West Region
 - Honorable Mention: SI/Kumamoto, Japan
- Membership
 - First Place: SI/Benicia, Founder Region
 - Honorable Mention: SI/Magalang, Philippines
- Program
 - First Place: SI/Borrego Springs, Dessert Coast Region
 - Honorable Mention: SI/Kumamoto-Sakura
- Public Awareness
 - First Place: SI/São Bento do Sul, Brazil
 - Honorable Mention: SI/Grand Erie, Eastern Canada Region

All Aboard the MemberSHIP

- Clubs with the highest percentage of new members during campaign period (June 1, 2017-May31, 2018)
 - North America: 100% increase in new members – SI/Surrey Delta, British Columbia, Canada
 - Latin America: 44% increase in new members – SI/Santa Fe, Mexico
 - Pacific Rim: 100% increase in new members – SI/Nantou, Taiwan
- Region with the highest percentage of new members during the campaign period (June 1, 2017-May 31, 2018)
 - Overall Winner: 27% increase in new members – Taiwan Region
- Clubs with highest percentage of new or chartered members retained from the 2016-2017 campaign year
 - North America: 100% retention of 21 new and chartered members – SI/Independence, KS, USA
 - Latin America: 100% retention of 8 new and chartered members – SI/Bucaramanga, Colombia
 - Pacific Rim: 100% retention of 46 new and chartered members – SI/Taichung Wenxin, Taiwan
- Clubs with largest percentage of net growth in the campaign year (June 1, 2017-May31, 2018)
 - North America: 100% increase in net growth – SI/Surrey Delta, British Columbia, Canada
 - Latin America: 42% increase in net growth – SI/La Mesa, Mexico
 - Pacific Rim: 100% increase in net growth – SI/Norzagaray Central, Philippines
- Largest number of new clubs chartered within a region (June 1, 2017-May31, 2018)
 - North America: 3 new clubs – Founder Region
 - Latin America: 2 new clubs – America del Sur Region
 - Pacific Rim: 18 new clubs – Philippines Region

Membership Certificate

- Club with largest net increase of members during 2017-2018
 - SI/Taiwan Province with 31 net members

Shaping the Future Awards

Presented to regions for efforts to support the Big Goal:

- Fundraising
 - First Place: Founder Region
 - Honorable Mention: Camino Real Region
- Membership
 - First Place: Philippines Region
 - Honorable Mention: Sierra Pacific Region
- Program
 - First Place: Sierra Pacific Region
 - Honorable Mention: Camino Real Region
- Public Awareness
 - First Place: Japan Minami region
- Outstanding Region
 - First Place: Camino Real region

Club Giving

- Dream Catchers—Clubs that donate \$10,000+
 - SI Coronado, CA, Desert Coast Region
 - SI Greater Santa Clarita Valley, CA, Camino Real Region
 - SI Hanford, CA – Sierra Pacific Region
 - SI Kagoshima, Japan Minami Region
 - SI Valencia, CA, Camino Real Region
 - SI Whitefish, MT, Northwestern Region
- Dream Chasers—Clubs that donated \$5,000 - \$9,999
 - SI Corona, CA, Golden West Region
 - SI Glendale, CA, Camino Real Region
 - SI Klamath Falls, OR, Northwestern Region
 - SI La Conner, WA, Northwestern Region
 - SI North San Diego, CA, Desert Coast Region
 - SI Poway, CA, Desert Coast Region
 - SI Tokyo-Azuma, Japan Higashi Region
 - SI Vacaville, CA, Founder Region
 - SI Vallejo, CA, Founder Region
 - SI Yamanashi, Japan Higashi Region

Save the Dates for Future SI and SIA Events

- July 18-21, 2019: SI 21st Convention, *Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia* [WATCH: Promo Video](#)
- July 22-25, 2020: SIA 46th Biennial Convention, *Bellevue, Washington, USA*
- October 1-3, 2021: Soroptimist 100th Anniversary Celebration, *San Francisco, California, USA*