Students dance 'for the kids'
Dance Marathon raises money for Children's Miracle Network Hospitals

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Written by Kristine Abshier

In its 19th anniversary, Dance Marathon at Florida State has changed some aspects, but its foundation is the same: Raising funds “for the kids” in a fun, light way that allows children with or in remission from cancer to feel like kids.

DM’s mission is to raise money for the FSU College of Medicine and Children’s Miracle Network Hospitals, who returns the funds to the community to benefit children with cancer. Dancers come to the Donald L. Tucker Civic Center in two 24-hour shifts to dance.

Participants of the second shift lined outside the civic center Saturday, watching the previous shift limp out. The enthusiastic dancers were ready to get on the floor with a shared reason: “For the kids.”
“It means a lot to me. Children with cancer, they don’t have a lot of people to fight for them [...]. So being able to financially support people and do it in a fun, eventful way is really great,” said Blake Steinvorth, a dancer with Zeta Beta Tau.

While participants were insistent about the importance of the cause at hand, they were aware that they had some prepping to do.

“This week, I made sure I was carb-loaded,” said Zach Rodefer, also of ZBT. “That’s important. You have to drink a lot of water. You have to make sure what you pack for Dance Marathon is conducive to the environment.”

Other participants agreed, and said they were sure to bring extra socks, makeup, face wash and other small tools to help keep them through their shifts.

Once the students started their shifts, they’re welcomed onto the dance floor. As the process moves forward, the dancers move through the program.

“On the hour, every hour, we do the dance,” said Taylor Pyle, a dance volunteer. “It’s like 8 minutes long. The rest of the time there are lots of activities. Every two hours there’s different theme, so, you dress up for that.”

In fact, this year, DM added many activities to the event, in order to keep good spirits to a high level. In between dances, the teams are “standing,” and with the introduction of more to do, the tone of the event is expected to become lighter.

“One of the newest things we implemented this year is the DM backyard,” said Kaitlyn Loughlin, Public Relations Assistant for DM at FSU. “It’s an area where they can go outside and just play corn hole. There’s a dunk tank where they can dunk the moral captains. We’re trying to make it more fun for the dances. More of a reward for the fundraising they’ve done.”

Every dancer has raised at least $150 before the event. Along with the fun time-fillers, participants also do eat meals, paint the faces of the children, and take part in several other recreations.

Loughlin says this year is also different because the students get more of an opportunity to bond with the children. Though the families get their own room to relax and get away from the hype, the children enjoy the increased interaction.
“They love to tell their stories and interact with us; because hanging out with the big kids is always fun,” Loughlin said.

Throughout the event, the Miracle Families take the stage and explain why DM and Children’s Miracle Network means so much to them. They partake in a Circle of Hope and tell their story. Some of the six to seven children included Jake Fox.

Jake is in remission, but still faces many hospital visits in his daily life. He and his family have been attending DM for 11 years now, maintaining a long-term relationship with the organization, as many of the other families have.

The dancers spoken to agree that the portion of the twenty hours when the families spoke, was most powerful. Pyle says when they get down to the last hour of the dance and hear the last family speak, it, “really hits home [...] that’s why I do it.”

Many FSU students pair DM and Greek life together. Loughlin indicates that this is something the organization is trying to break free of.

“We really want to steer away from Greek organization affiliation. It’s not all about being Greek. We definitely have a big base of people who come independently. It’s not all necessarily Panhellenic or IFC that come. We also have multi cultural sororities and fraternities and we have lady spirit hunters that come just as RSOs on campus,” Loughlin said.

Last year, DM raised $701,493 for children trying to beat cancer with dance and determination. This year, they’ve still got one thing on their minds: “The kids.”