

## Dance marathon to benefit children coping with illness

By Jordan Culver

Democrat staff writer

Lisa Phelps played four square on Friday night and paid absolutely no attention to the score, or even to the rules of the playground game.

She and her three other friends were just passing time during Florida State University's 17th annual dance marathon. Phelps, an 18-year-old FSU sophomore, was at the event with Alpha Chi Omega Sorority and said she was confident she could keep her energy up throughout her 20-hour shift. The first half of the marathon kicked off at 7 p.m. Friday. The first half of more than 1,700 students from FSU's fraternities and sororities took to the dance floor at the Civic Center determined to power through their shift, which ends at 3 p.m. today.

"I'm not tired yet," Phelps said around 8 p.m. Friday. "But then, I had a calculus test this morning so I didn't get much sleep. Talk to me around 3 o'clock tomorrow and I probably won't be as happy."

Funds from the marathon are donated to Shands Hospital for Children in Gainesville, the Children's Miracle Network and FSU's College of Medicine. The funds help out families of children like Parker Fox, a 12-year-old who battled leukemia at a young age.

Parker's mother, Cathy Fox, said thanks to events like the dance marathon, her son was able to receive help from Shands and is now in his 10th year of remission.

"It is wonderful to see the college students giving support," Parker said. "Just dancing for 20 hours straight with no breaks."

Allison Johnson, the person in charge of keeping up morale for both shifts, spent the first three hours of Friday night's shift teaching dancers an eight-minute line dance. Since she's in charge of teaching the dance for both shifts with a three-hour break in between, she laughed when asked if she had downtime.

"I don't know if I really ever relax," she said. "It's definitely a workout, but I love it. This is my second year doing this and I can't really think about doing anything else."

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PHOTOS BY MIKE EWEN/DEMOCRAT

**Taylor Johnson, left, and friend Catie Cartee, right, get into character for their dance routine on Friday night. Hundreds of Florida State students will be spending their weekend trying to raise money for sick children in 2012's version of the dance marathon in the Civic Center. At left, Kat Maultsby — who lost her leg to cancer — gave a speech before hundreds of dancers. The dancing will continue until Sunday.**

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### Dance

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Even students who admitted they didn't have an affinity for dancing gave an honest effort to learn the dance. Alan Tegrone, 19, said the event was about supporting families who need help. Tegrone said he was determined to exude positivity during the marathon.

"I'm having a blast," he said. "I'm not the greatest at dancing but I had a lot of fun with the line dance. I think I just about got the whole thing down."

The marathon raised almost \$500,000 last year and about \$3.3 million over the last 16 years, according to the marathon's official website. Kiara Provenzano, the spokeswoman for the marathon, said the event is essentially a year-round effort.

"We do different fundraisers throughout the year to kind of lead up to the marathon," she said. "We do fundraisers at different vendors and actually hold events on campus."

Provenzano said members of the marathon's committee have been working to prepare the space for the actual marathon for more than a week.

Students got a chance to see the cause their hard work goes to during the event. Several "Miracle Babies" from the Children's Miracle network stepped up on stage to share their stories. Bradee Hernandez, a 19-year-old sophomore with Sigma Delta Tau, said the stories were "amazing."

"It's very rewarding to hear what you're raising money for," she said. Hernandez said she participated in the marathon last year and raised \$600. She picked up an additional \$300 this year.

The next shift of marathon dancers starts at 7 p.m. today and finishes up at 3 p.m. Sunday.

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