

# FSU Dance Marathon sets another fundraising record

Alex Burnham, Staff Writer 11:16 a.m. EST March 2, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy of Dance Marathon)

From early evening on Friday, Feb. 26 to late afternoon on Sunday, thousands of volunteers, dancers, miracle families and supporters gathered on foot and filled the Donald L. Tucker Civic Center. After months of preparation and weeks of fundraising, Dance Marathon at Florida State was underway and immediately making a difference, ultimately raising \$1,435,120.32 For the Kids.

For 40 hours (split into two, 20-hour shifts) Florida State students and volunteers from various groups, organizations and businesses remained upright and dancing to raise awareness and funds for Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, which provide care for children in need of specialized pediatric and medical care that is not available to them locally. In addition, the FSU marathon raises money for Shands Children's Hospital in Gainesville and the FSU College of Medicine Pediatric Outreach Program

The essence of Dance Marathon and the reason for such dedication and altruism is For the Kids. If you stepped foot inside the Civic Center or talked to anyone involved, it was hard to miss this sentiment. No matter the organization, no matter the individual, For the Kids (or FTK) was the message and the mission of everyone involved.

"We are always focused on the why: why we come out here, why we care, why we keeping growing," Shannon Wakeford, a dancer and member of Alpha Omicron Pi, said. "For us, it is the opportunity to meet these miracle families, hear their stories, and to know that we made a difference—that's what keeps us coming back."

While Dance Marathon's ultimate focus is on the kids and the cause, there are opportunities for the students and volunteers to show their dedication to the foundation. The Mr. and Ms. DM competition, which helped get volunteers excited and involved in the fundraiser, is an example of one of these opportunities. Garret Franskousky, former Mr. DM and current morale captain, explained the process and the positive effects of the competition.

"The winner is based on a point system, where the contestants make a video, answer various questions and participate in competitive games on and off stage," he said. "It is a great way to keep the energy up and get people to pay more attention to our cause."

As the emcee of the Mr. and Ms. DM competition and a leading morale captain, Franskousky is deeply involved in Dance Marathon. Having both personal experience with the foundation and working as a leading volunteer, Franskousky also understands the effects it can have on families and individuals.

"My brother was born two and a half months premature. I spent about a year in the hospital with my parents, hoping he would be okay. This foundation, and what it stands for, helped my family in our time of struggle, and continues to do the same for new families each year," said Franskousky.

At the end of the fundraiser, the winners of Mr. and Ms. DM were announced: Bart Hurley and Hannah Akil, respectively.

Other awards consisted of the highest fundraising individual (Leslie Blalock), Delegate of the Year (Dalton Groff), and the highest fundraising teams: including Team Parker (Kappa Kappa Gamma and Theta Chi), Team Ragan (Alpha Phi Omega and Lady Spirithunters) and the Wesley Foundation.

By closing ceremonies on Sunday afternoon, the grand total was accounted for, and volunteers, miracle families and supporters all waited in anticipation for the final reveal. The Dance Marathon executive board gathered on the main stage and raised the number high and proud: \$1,435,120.32.

The funds raised for this year's Dance Marathon exceeded one million dollars once again and totaled over \$300,000 more than last year. Additionally, over \$100,000 of that total was raised by marathon volunteers in a single day. All of the funds raised will go to providing medical care, treatment and research at Children's Miracle Network Hospitals, Shands and the FSU College of Medicine.

With each new year, Dance Marathon at Florida State University raises even more money and helps even more people. This year, donations from friends and family, from students around campus and from sponsors across Tallahassee and the country helped Florida State Dance Marathon raise more money than it ever has before.

On stage, President John Thrasher remarked, "Nothing, nothing, nothing makes me prouder than seeing you all here, doing what you do, helping other people—for the cause, For the Kids."

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