

Inspiring Okeechobee: Okeechobee graduates join Dance Marathon

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OKEECHOBEE — Okeechobee High School alumni Tyler Finney, a graduate student at the Florida State University (FSU) along with several other graduates from Okeechobee High School — Aubrey Robertson, Danyelle Sheffield, Lexi Ward, Emily Murrow, Tyler and Brittany Milrot — are some of the students who have participated in the Dance Marathon event to raise money for Children’s Miracle Network Hospitals as well as other charitable organizations.

I got the opportunity to speak with Tyler, while he was home for a visit, about this amazing experience. Tyler is in his fourth year of participation. This past year he was a part of the internal organizational team as the finance director for FSU. Tyler and his team are responsible for fundraising, tracking of donations and bookkeeping for the events. Tyler’s initial involvement stemmed from involvement in a college fraternity. He found that Dance Marathon was a way to get involved in the community and represent the fraternity, first as a dancer in the marathon and now part of its leadership.

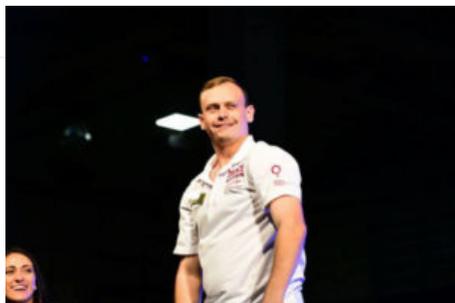
FSU is in its 23rd year participating in Dance Marathon and this past year raised an astonishing \$1.83 million dollars. Half of the money was given to Shands Hospital in Gainesville while the other half is used to fund programs through the FSU College of Medicine’s Pediatric Outreach efforts. Dance Marathon is not unique to FSU, as this event is now hosted at over 350 universities across the nation.

Tyler notes that Dance Marathon is a, “year-long fundraising event for Children’s Miracle Network.” The campaign begins in the summer with fundraising planning. One campaign at FSU attempts to raise over \$200,000 in one day, which they exceeded by raising \$240,000. The events culminate in a 40-hour dance marathon where students who meet the individual fundraising goal of \$300 are invited to attend the dance in one of two 20-hour shifts of dancing/standing.

From the universities’ example, high schools have now embraced the challenge of raising money for Dance Marathon, hosting smaller events. Tyler reported that the nine Tallahassee high schools who assist FSU, raised \$130,000 this past year, helping FSU exceed the 2017 goal of \$1.7 million dollars raised.



Tyler Finney. The comma tshirt is in reference to the fact that in the group shot, (below) he is one of the people who holds the comma.



Tyler Finney

Tyler notes that Aubrey Robertson is a 4-year dancer, while Danyelle Sheffield and Lexi Ward participated for their first time this year. He went on to report that Emily Murrow, attended UF and participated at their university for several years. He recalls that she was a family relations captain, or one who manages families who are connected to the events because they have been served by Children’s Miracle Network hospitals. These families come to events throughout the year, to make the connection for both the students

and the families about the importance of the events and services that children receive from the proceeds.

Tyler noted that this past year FSU was the top university in the country for growth in fundraising and is the fourth largest fundraiser in the country for Dance Marathon. He reports that 14% of the student body participates in some way to help this cause, which is phenomenal. Over 2,000 students raised the required \$300 to participate in the actual Dance Marathon event, with another 3,000 raising money throughout the year.

Tyler remarked that this experience has helped him contribute to a great cause, while learning essential skills that he will need to put to good use when he enters the workforce after college. Tyler is thankful his family and friends have supported his efforts from a distance these past four years for this experience of a lifetime. Tyler intends to graduate with his Master's Degree in Sports Management in the Spring of 2018. Thank you, Tyler for representing your family well and inspiring our community this week.



Leah Suarez is a freelance writer.