

On the floor

11:01 p.m. Friday

Jeremy Deiter (sophomore-health and human development) dove headfirst into a pool of baby powder during the first "bathroom break," where dancers slid down a long strip of floor covered with powder into the hands of cheering moralers, who massage the dancers' tired bodies.

Committee members began to scream a countdown from 10 as they massaged Deiter and other dancers.

"Millions of hands all over your body, touching places you thought you never had — and it feels great," Deiter said.

7:15 a.m. Saturday

Julian Rivera said his doctor told him he was crazy for dancing in Thon this weekend.

"I was sick last Tuesday and went to the hospital on Wednesday. They took [my appendix] out," Rivera (senior-economics) said, while he lifted his shirt to reveal a four-inch scar covered in bandages, on his right side.

"My doctor told me 'No physical activity for six weeks,'" Rivera said. "I said 'No matter what you say, I'm dancing.'"

Rivera said the area ached throughout Thon weekend. "It hurts, let me tell you," he said. "It hurts a lot when I do the line dance."

Rivera said that although many doubted his ability to dance, he knew the way to conquer Thon was not by physical prowess, but mind power.

"I knew it's 90 percent mental," Rivera said. "Be headstrong."

8:30 a.m. Saturday

Moraler Teresa Van Wagner was carrying a homemade die, with the name of a body part scrawled on each of the six sides.

"I just randomly go up to people and ask if they want a massage," Van Wagner (senior-graphic design) said as she knelt over the feet of a dancer.

"So far, it's been a success," Van Wagner said, adding that no dancer had turned down her offer.

Her experiences dancing two years ago gave Van Wagner the idea of massaging the dancers.

"[The massages] helped me loosen up and forget my pain," Van Wagner said.

7 p.m. Saturday

Dressed in a green T-shirt, shorts and french braided pigtails, Cynthia Jean Inman (junior-elementary education) softly said her dancer number into the microphone.

As she addressed the crowd, "Cynthia Jean Inman, Will You Marry Me?" appeared on the two large screens hanging above her.

Boyfriend Greg Mitisifer from New York, came out from behind the stage.

Inman said yes, and "Chapel of Love" played throughout Rec Hall.

"I just wanted to do something really special," Mitisifer said, while holding on to Inman's hand as she slowly wiped away her tears.

7:45 p.m. Saturday

Eight-year-old Eli Sidler proudly displayed his belief that "cancer sucks" on a dark blue, knitted wool hat while taking a break in between squirt gun battles.

Sidler said his aunt knitted him the hat, but she wanted to originally sew a different message onto it.

"She wanted to put the f-word on it, but my mom didn't think that was a good idea, so she put 'cancer sucks' on it instead," he said.

Although Sidler is only 8, he said he was fully aware of the message his hat displays. "As a lot of people say, the hat says it all," he said.

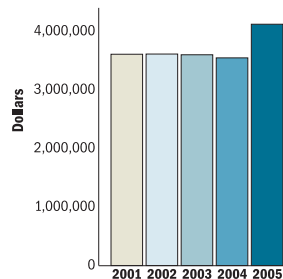
3:10 a.m. Sunday

At Mail Call, while other dancers opened up their conventional letters, Leah Finerty (senior-hotel, restaurant and institutional management) pulled out items like a "Frank the Tank" T-shirt, a large action figure and a funny visor.

"My dad made this shirt for me, and he put a sticky note on it," she said. "It says, 'What do you and Frank the Tank have in common? You are both dancing.' On the action figure, his note says, 'If you need CPR, this rescue action figure will kiss you back to life!'"

Raising the bar

This year's dance marathon raised a total of \$4,122,483 — the highest in Thon's 32-year history and \$500,000 more than last year's total.



Source: Collegian archives

Jeremy Drey/Collegian



Morale Captains cry and hug after watching the video of the children who benefit from the proceeds collected from the Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon.



Penn State President Graham Spanier gets hoisted into the air by students during the last hours of Thon.

Athletes relate to, support children

By Adena Schwartz

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Penn State men's soccer defender Grady Renfrow knows what it feels like to not be able to play his favorite sport.

"It was almost a year ago today that I was diagnosed with leukemia," he said. "I didn't know what to expect ... I was really scared."

Renfrow (sophomore-business) said the key to his recovery was his positive attitude and defiant stance in the face of the disease.

"I was really frustrated at times," he said. "At times I would ask, 'Why did this have to happen to me?' However, I learned to roll with the punches, and now that I look back on it, I believe that it helped me more than anything."

Although he redshirted this past season, Renfrow's return to the soccer team was a feat of determination.

"By the time I got out of the hospital, I couldn't really walk, and it took a while to get my strength back," he said. "When I got back, my coaches didn't really know what to tell me, so I did my own thing. I was surprised — I thought it would take longer to get my leg strength back."

Renfrow said at this year's Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, he used his experiences to communicate with and relate to the Four Diamonds children and families on a different level.

"I've done a lot of talking with one [particular] kid — we've gone through a lot of the same stuff, and we've been sharing stories," Renfrow said. "He plays soccer too, and I wanted him to know that I got through this, and I'm back playing soccer."

At noon Saturday, Rec Hall's South Gym was filled with Penn State athletes who came together for the Athlete Hour, where Penn State athletes interact and play with Four Diamonds children and their families.

Many Penn State sports teams were represented, including the football, field hockey, volleyball, dance, tennis and golf teams, as well as the cheerleading squad.

Penn State football player Nick Daise (junior-turfgrass science) tossed a ball to a different kind of teammate — a child who was giggling and barely grazed four feet tall.

"I think that our position as athletes puts us up on a pedestal," he said. "Being here reaches out to the kids and sets an example."

The South Gym was buzzing with action as each team played a different sport or worked activity booths.

Tessa Rivera, an 11-year-old Four Diamonds child, shouted "duck, duck, goose" as she ran around a circle of women's soccer team players.

"Tessa has had chemotherapy and open heart surgery, but she loves coming to Thon and thrives on it," Ed Rivera, Tessa's father, said.

"We look forward to Athlete Hour because it gives a little break from the big crowds, and the kids can interact in a casual setting," he added.

Volunteers for Locks of Love donate hair, sport new styles

By Kate Faxon-St. Georges

and Christiana Varda

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Eleven-year-old Sara Culver's blonde ponytail was in one of the Ziploc bags Caitlyn Burns was holding.

Culver had been growing her hair out especially for this occasion.

"I've been told I've had pretty hair a lot and thought someone else could use it," she said.

Culver was one of 16 volunteers who cut their hair on stage at 9:30 Saturday morning for Locks of Love, a nationwide non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to children under 18 who suffer from long-term medical hair loss.

This is the fourth year Locks of Love has been part of the Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon.

Burns (senior-elementary education) organized the event this year.

"I chose to do this because my friend has leukemia, and she lost her hair, and I'm doing it for her," she said. "So when I came to Penn State, I knew I wanted to get involved with this."

At 6:15 p.m. Saturday there was a second Locks of Love announcement, where Burns reintroduced the 16 women and others who had cut their hair this year.

"This morning you saw 16 girls donate their hair live on stage," she said. "I think they all deserve a round of applause."

The women were introduced as Letters to Cleo's "Supermodel," made famous by the movie *Clueless*, played. They all linked arms and bowed in small groups, showing the audience their short new 'dos.

"I was so nervous right before they cut my hair, but I knew I was going to do it," Kelly Cooper (senior-elementary education) said. "I've done it before, and it's for such a great cause so I'm really happy I did it."

Chrissy Mitinger, a stylist at Hair Loft by Charles, 419 E. Calder Way, who helped with Locks of Love, said most people were excited, some were nervous and one woman was crying before she cut her ponytail.

Marissa Musumeci, a 2003 alumna, cut 13 inches from her hair, which she had been growing since May.

She had cut her hair as a dancer in 2002 and decided to cut it again this year.

"I love my hair because it's long and thick," she said. "If someone else is going to get it and love it too, that's awesome."

Locks of Love was started in 1997 by Madonna Coffman, after her four-year-old daughter lost her hair, said Stephanie Gill, Locks of Love case manager.

The organization has only five employees and receives 3,000 donations a week from more than 1,000 participating hair salons nationwide.

"It's a very small sacrifice that will help someone else," Burns said.

Thon kids 'soak' dancers with games, appreciation

By Megan Rundle

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Eight-year-old Charlie Karchner, decked out in a blue top hat and matching cape, couldn't wait to get his Supersoaker — complete with water storage backpack — filled so he could get back to drenching his next victim.

"My favorite part [of Thon] is shooting water guns so we can have wars," Charlie said as he paused to squirt a passing dancer. "We get water guns so we can have wars."

During the 48 hours of the Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, Four Diamonds children could be seen everywhere — some dancing, others playing catch and many armed with their own super-soaking squirt guns.

Hula hoops and deflated balls were scattered across the floor of Rec Hall this weekend.

Water coolers sat around the perimeter of the dance floor to provide ammunition for the water fights. Excited children eagerly pushed through the crowds to be hoisted on the shoulders of those taller than them.

The Karchners were one of several families that came out to celebrate Thon this weekend. The family came to support Charlie, who was diagnosed

"Thon raises money for kids like me and without it, it probably would be a lot different for kids with cancer."

Sophie Restall

Four Diamonds child

with acute lymphoblastic leukemia on Oct. 19, 2001, and just finished his last session of chemotherapy in January.

"When Charlie first got sick, a bunch of my friends and me sold some of our stuff, like our seashells, and gave the money to my mom to give to cancer research," said 9-year-old Kayla, Charlie's sister.

Nearby, 10-year-old Sophie Restall was enjoying her fifth consecutive year at Thon.

Adorned with a princess tiara, Restall, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2000, has been in remission for the past four years. "I like being here — it's fun," she said. "I played my clarinet in the variety show, and I'm looking forward to seeing a bathroom break."

Even when the dancers started to slow, Restall kept moving.



Tyler Speraw, 5, gives a necklace to Kevin Deutsch (junior-marketing).

Around her, children threw footballs, hula-hoop and jumped rope to keep their sponsors energized and motivated.

"A lot of good things happen here," she said. "Thon raises money for kids

like me and without it, it probably would be a lot different for kids with cancer."

Restall said that if she had it her way, she would stay for the full 48 hours.