

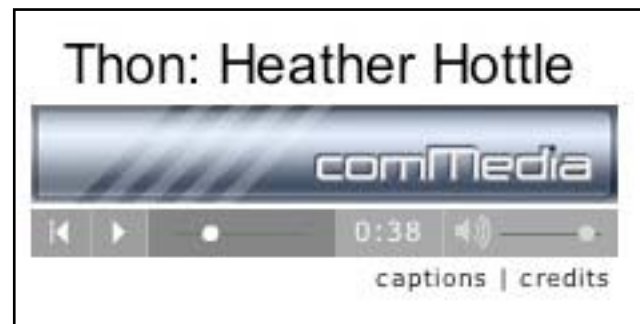
This dancer has every reason to celebrate

By Sheila Lindberg

Thon 2008 coverage written for Comm 460

STATE COLLEGE—For some Penn State students, participating in a 46-hour dance marathon is about more than just raising money for pediatric cancer; it’s about taking a stand against a disease that has affected their own lives dramatically.

Heather Hottle, a 22-year-old senior from Somerset, Pa., was diagnosed with stage four Hodgkin’s disease a month before she began her final year of high school. What began as a routine doctor visit for shoulder pain eventually led to an X-ray that exposed a mass in Hottle’s chest.



Being diagnosed with cancer felt “like you got hit by a train,” she said. “I cried a lot, obviously, but I just kind of blocked a lot of it out.”

Hottle’s treatment consisted of four rounds of chemo and a few months of radiation at the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh.

“It was really good timing,” she said. “A couple weeks later, and I don’t know if I would be here or not today.”

Throughout the therapy, Hottle did her best to remain active, participating as much as she was able in cheerleading and volleyball. She said the most difficult aspect of the treatment was losing her hair. But Hottle had lots of support from her friends and family, especially from her best friend and current boyfriend, Ben Flower.

“All I did was offer to be someone she could talk to and vent to,” Flower said.

Hottle appreciated Flower’s friendship and encouragement. “Having been through that experience with someone really makes you see who they are,” she said.

Bari Drake, Hottle’s current roommate, admires her for being “positive” and “incredibly ambitious.” Hottle, a double major in journalism and international politics, is currently working as an intern at the *Centre Daily Times*. In addition, she belongs to a select group of students from

around the country chosen to participate in the prestigious Dow Jones newspaper editing internship program this summer.

Drake said that whenever she needs something, Hottle drops whatever she's doing to be there for her.

"Heather is really amazing and really fun to live with," Drake said. "I'm going to be sad when we graduate and I won't be able to see her all the time."

This year, Hottle—sponsored by her sorority, Sigma Sigma Sigma—will be dancing for the first time in the annual two-day dance marathon at the Bryce Jordan Center organized by THON, the largest student-run philanthropy in the world. All proceeds from the marathon will benefit The Four Diamonds Fund, whose mission is to conquer childhood cancer by assisting children and their families treated at the Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, Pa.

Over the past 35 years, THON has raised more than \$46 million and helped more than 2,000 families. The money raised last year alone reached over \$5 million.

Hottle said she is looking forward to dancing. She has been involved in THON since her freshman year, serving as a communications committee member her sophomore year and as a special assistant captain her junior year. This year, as a public relations captain, she is responsible for putting together the Diamonder Magazine, a publication all about THON.

"I'm really excited because it's kind of the only view of THON I haven't had yet," Hottle said.

To prepare for the marathon, Hottle has cut caffeine out of her diet and is trying to exercise regularly.

"I'll be so excited [when Thon is over] to have my coffee in the morning because I'm a huge coffee drinker," she said.