

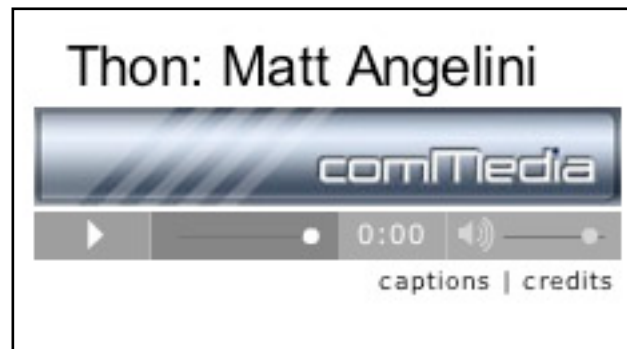
Donors, Musicians, and Students Unite for Kids

By Dave DeIuliis

Thon 2008 coverage written for Comm 460

After nearly 30 sleepless hours, the last two of which were spent gyrating to the music of a live band, Andrew Marshaleck skipped off the floor of the Bryce Jordan Center Saturday, and between beads of sweat exclaimed, “What else is there to eat?”

Turns out, quite a bit, as the Bryce Jordan Center said goodbye to basketball over the weekend and hosted the Penn State Dance Marathon, the 46-hour no-sleep, no-sitting culmination of a year-long



fundraising effort to conquer childhood cancer. The efforts and enthusiasm of Marshaleck and his 700 moralers, along with 300 captains, 3,300 committee members, 700 dancers and countless donors and supporters made the event possible.

The Penn State Interfraternity/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, known as THON, is the largest student-run philanthropy in the world. The proceeds, including the \$6.6 million raised this year and totaling over \$50 million since its inception in 1973, are given to the Four Diamonds Fund, which has helped over 2,000 families with children being treated for pediatric cancer at Penn State Children’s Hospital in Hershey, Pa. While such large involvement is integral to the

success of THON, feeding that many people is not an easy task, especially when 700 of them have not slept in two days.

Committee members, such as Meals Captains Jillian O'Donnell and Skyler William Cole, work with State College businesses to provide them with much-needed nourishment.

“We contract meals for the 300 captains during THON weekend with the help of over 25 donors within State College,” said O'Donnell. “We typically have food coming in every three hours. Meals range from cereal and bagels to all sorts of sandwiches, finger foods and pizza.”

Some of the biggest donors include Roly Poly, TGI Friday's, Eat' n Park, Papa John's, Fraser Street Deli, Tony's Big Easy and Subway, she said.

Eat' n Park Restaurants, in addition to the donation of its popular Smiley Cookies, has given over \$26,000 to the Four Diamonds Fund through its Caring for Kids Campaign.

When the dancers, committee members and fans are not eating, they are entertained by DJ Larry Moore, who has the difficult task of appealing to an audience which can, and often does, range from young children to older adults.

To make his job easier, several live bands, many comprised of Penn State students and alumni, are chosen to perform throughout the weekend. Bands Captains Samantha Brandolini and Tracey Morgenstern must choose bands that appeal to the diverse THON audience.

“We try to switch things up so dancers, captains, committee members, and spectators alike can all hopefully be entertained and not bored,” said Brandolini. “Instead of listening to Larry Moore all weekend, live bands provide a change of pace.”

To choose the live acts, Morgenstern and Brandolini sorted through a large number of requests, recommendations and MySpace pages while watching potential bands perform at State College bars. “Obviously, it's hard to please everyone but we do our best to choose acts that the majority of people will enjoy,” said Brandolini. “My co-captain and I worked really hard to pick bands that are fun, talented and diverse in sound, so we hope that the dancers will enjoy them.”

One of the 10 bands that made the cut was Super 71, a rock band whose guitarist, Bob Robbins, has experienced THON from both the stage and the floor.

“To play at THON is a great honor for our band,” said Robbins. “As a Penn State alum and THON dancer in 2006, I am personally grateful for the opportunity to give back to an experience that has shaped my life in so many ways.”

Moraler Michael Niffenegger believes the bands were a success. “I think that the bands that played at THON really positively affected the dancers,” he said. “The bands made the atmosphere seem almost like a party, helping them with the pain.”