

The Daily Collegian

For the students. For the glory. Since 1887.

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THON 2025



Graphic by Isabella Viteri

Photo by Alexandra Antoniono

Special THON Coverage Inside

HISTORY OF THON

By Elsa Brumbaugh
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

THON is the world's largest student-run philanthropy that aims to provide emotional and financial support to Four Diamonds families who have been impacted by childhood cancer. Though it's a massive operation today, it started from much humbler beginnings.

As the 53rd THON Weekend approaches, take a look at the story of a Penn State tradition's remarkable evolution through Collegian reporting.

1973: First Interfraternity Council dance marathon

According to Collegian archives, the first dance marathon was hosted in 1973 when "the Interfraternity Council sponsored a dance marathon in the HUB Ballroom."

Dancers participated for 30 hours from Friday evening to midnight on Sunday, with 17 of the 39 couples that entered completing the full run. Cris Guenter and Sam Walker won the contest, who were "chosen on a point system, with couples receiving a point for each minute danced and each dollar donated in their name."

The total of \$2,000 went toward what is now known as the Arc of Butler County, which serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

1977: Partnership with Four Diamonds

In 1977, the IFC selected the Four Diamonds Cancer Fund of the Milton S. Hershey Medical Center to be the charity to receive funds from the dance marathon.

According to Collegian archives, the fund was created by the University's Board of Trustees to "help pay for the medical expenses of children with cancer."

The 1977 IFC Dance Marathon generated a record-breaking total, receiving \$28,685 in pledges and donations. Four Diamonds became the sole THON



Courtesy of Pat Little

Participants dance during the 1983 THON in the White Building. This was the first time the dance marathon raised over \$100,000.

1979: Dance marathon moves to White Building

The dance marathon had been held in the HUB Ballroom since its inception in 1973. This changed in 1979, when the event outgrew the ballroom and relocated to the nearby White Building.

This year, dancers no longer competed against each other. Instead, they had a shared goal of standing throughout the full 48 hour event.

According to Collegian archives, dancers occupied themselves with "calisthenics, snowballs, squirt guns and line dances" to stay engaged, raising \$72,132 in the process.

1983: Dance marathon breaks \$100,000 record

According to Collegian archives, 355 dancers completed the 1983 IFC Dance Marathon in three divisions: Greek, independent and Commonwealth campus. The fraternity/sorority

couple of Kappa Delta Rho fraternity and Delta Delta Delta sorority raised the most money with \$26,200.

The total proceeds of the event reached an all-time high of \$131,181 — the first time the dance marathon raised over \$100,000.

1992: THON breaks \$1 million record

Only nine years later, another record was shattered. The 1992 dance marathon, now renamed THON, generated over \$1 million in proceeds for the first time.

The total of \$1,141,145 was "about a 46 percent increase upon last year's total of \$785,835," according to Collegian archives.

1997: First Family Carnival

Now a staple THON event, the Family Carnival made its debut in 1997. The founding purpose of the carnival was to "let Four Diamonds families and students meet each other," which still holds true today.

According to Collegian

archives, there were various organizations manning booths and activities ranging from "a duck pond to a Twister game."

People attending the event said it was a great way for the family members to interact with students before THON.

1999: THON moves to Rec Hall

After 20 years in the White Building, THON's exponential growth forced another change of venue in 1999.

According to Collegian archives, the increasing number of dancer applications caused a need for more committee members and space for food and other supplies, prompting the move to Rec Hall.

A larger space meant the opportunity for more dancers, in turn raising more money to benefit Four Diamonds. This proved to be true, as a record-breaking \$2,530,142 was raised at THON 1999.

2002: First THON 5K

The first THON 5K was held Oct. 28, 2001, in preparation for THON 2002. It was an unprecedented success, drawing over 800 participants despite frigid temperatures.

According to Collegian archives, the winners of the 5K were a Penn State cross country team member and a member of the previous year's team. Both runners tied with a time of 15:48.

Patty Hoffman, public relations chair for THON 2002, said the turnout was much larger than they initially anticipated.

2007: THON moves to Bryce Jordan Center

In 2007, THON made its third and final move, relocating to its current location at the Bryce Jordan Center. The move was made to accommodate THON's growth, as more space was needed for the increased number of dancers and attendees.

As a result of the move, the final day of THON was cut short by

two hours to accommodate the BJC's prior commitments to Big Ten athletic events. Ever since, THON has remained a 46-hour event, rather than the 48-hour marathon it had been for the majority of its history.

2015: THON Store opens

In 2015, the HUB underwent a major expansion project. Along with two new meeting rooms and new open lounge spaces, a significant addition was the THON Store.

The store sells merchandise for the THON 5K, 100 Days 'Til THON and THON Weekend, with all proceeds going directly to THON and later donated to Four Diamonds.

2021: Virtual THON

THON was hosted online in 2021 during COVID-19.

THON dancers and attendees were no longer allowed inside the BJC, and performers and dance captains had limited access to the main stage.

Dancers participated from home, and the events inside the BJC were broadcasted live by 46 Live on THON's website.

The inability to fundraise in person impacted the total amount of money raised — \$10,638,078.62, more than \$1 million less than the previous year. Despite this, THON participants were still proud of their efforts.

"\$10 million is still \$10 million more than we had, so I think it's still awesome," student Joseph Cardina said at the time.

2024: THON breaks

fundraising total for third consecutive year

THON raised \$16,955,683 last year, marking the third year in a row the philanthropy broke its fundraising total after raising \$15,006,132 in 2023.

Supply Logistics was the top fundraising committee, while Atlas was the top special interest organization, bringing in \$227,754.

Taylor Sekelsky and Dani Sekelsky were the top independent dancer couple at \$50,464, with Fayette as the top commonwealth campus at \$98,038.33. Phi Chi Theta was the top general organization at \$246,266.29, while Zeta Tau Alpha and Alpha Tau Omega was the top Greek organization at \$509,207.75

To email reporter: elb5848@psu.edu.

Follow her on X @elsabrumbaugh24.



Courtesy of Cris Guenter

Cris Guenter (right) and Sam Walker (left) stand together during the first THON. Dancers participated for 30 hours, with 17 of the 39 couples that entered completing the whole run.

Ways to watch

By Julia Key

THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State's annual 46-hour dance marathon will be held at the Bryce Jordan Center from 6 p.m. Friday to 4 p.m. Sunday. However, you do not have to be there to watch the singing, standing and dancing commence.

46LIVE, a student-run organization supported by the Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications, live streams the entirety of THON Weekend, including student performances, speeches, line dancing and interviews with students on the floor. The organization also streams all of the pre-THON weekend events leading up to the dance marathon.

The link to watch the live stream is provided on THON's official website page.

6ABC in Philadelphia will also showcase THON for the fourth consecutive year from 7-7:30 p.m. Saturday. ABC23 in Altoona will broadcast THON during the same time.

THON's official social media accounts on Facebook, X and Instagram, will also post real-time photo and video coverage throughout the weekend.

To email reporter: jek5914@psu.edu.

Follow her on X @meteology_jek.

Guide to THON Weekend

Entrances, packing and parking information for this weekend

By Jocelyn Bilker
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

As THON Weekend approaches, it's important to be prepared for hours on end at the Bryce Jordan Center. Here's a handy guide on the best entrances, what to bring (and not bring) and everything else you need to know to make the experience smooth and stress-free.

Best entrances to the BJC for THON Weekend

The BJC has multiple entrances, each located at different points near the complex. Make sure to use the right entrance for quick access to the event:

Gate A: Located at the corner of Curtin Road and University Drive.

Gate B: Situated on University Drive.

Gate C: Located along Curtin Road.

Gate D: Off of Dauer Drive.

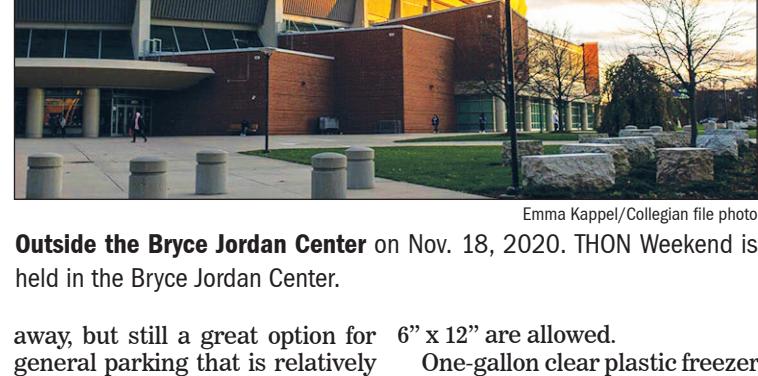
Parking information

Parking at the BJC for THON is typically available in the following general lots:

Jordan East: Located near the BJC, this lot provides easy access to Gates A and C.

Stadium West: A short walk to the BJC, this lot provides access to Gates C and D.

Porter North: Slightly farther



Emma Kappel/Collegian file photo

Outside the Bryce Jordan Center on Nov. 18, 2020. THON Weekend is held in the Bryce Jordan Center.

away, but still a great option for general parking that is relatively close to the BJC.

What you can and can't bring into the BJC

To ensure a safe and enjoyable THON weekend, there are strict security measures in place, including walk-through metal detectors and bag checks at all entrances.

Here's a quick rundown of what's allowed and what's not:

Permitted items:

Bags made of clear plastic, vinyl or PVC that don't exceed 12" x

6" x 12" are allowed.

One-gallon clear plastic freezer bag: Think Ziploc bags — perfect for keeping your small items organized.

Small clutch bags: These must be no larger than 4.5" x 6.5", with or without a strap.

Wallets, medical supplies and necessary items: These are allowed but may need to be inspected.

Items NOT permitted:

Large bags: Backpacks, duffle bags, purses, briefcases and coolers are strictly prohibited.

Non-clear bags: Any bag that isn't clear or exceeds the size

limit (12" x 6" x 12") will not be allowed in.

Outside food and beverages: Unless medically necessary, these are not allowed inside the venue.

Large umbrellas, selfie sticks or other items deemed unsafe: Anything that can obstruct views or create a safety hazard will be prohibited.

Helpful tips for THON

Weekend:

With large crowds expected, the earlier you arrive, the better your chances of finding a close parking spot and avoiding long lines at the entrances.

Since larger bags are prohibited, try to keep your belongings to a minimum to make the entry process faster.

Expect to go through metal detectors, so limit the items you're carrying for a smoother security experience.

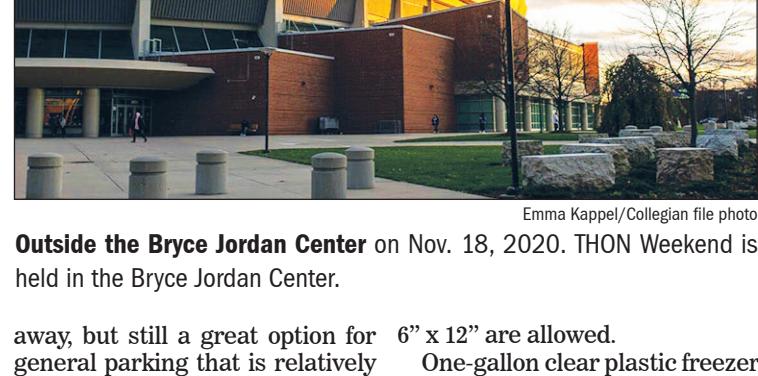
By planning ahead, knowing your entrances and following the security guidelines, you'll have a fantastic THON Weekend at the BJC.

To email reporter: jpb6798@psu.edu.

Follow her on X @meteology_joc.

To email reporter: jek5914@psu.edu.

Follow her on X @juliakey.



Emma Kappel/Collegian file photo

Outside the Bryce Jordan Center on Nov. 18, 2020. THON Weekend is held in the Bryce Jordan Center.

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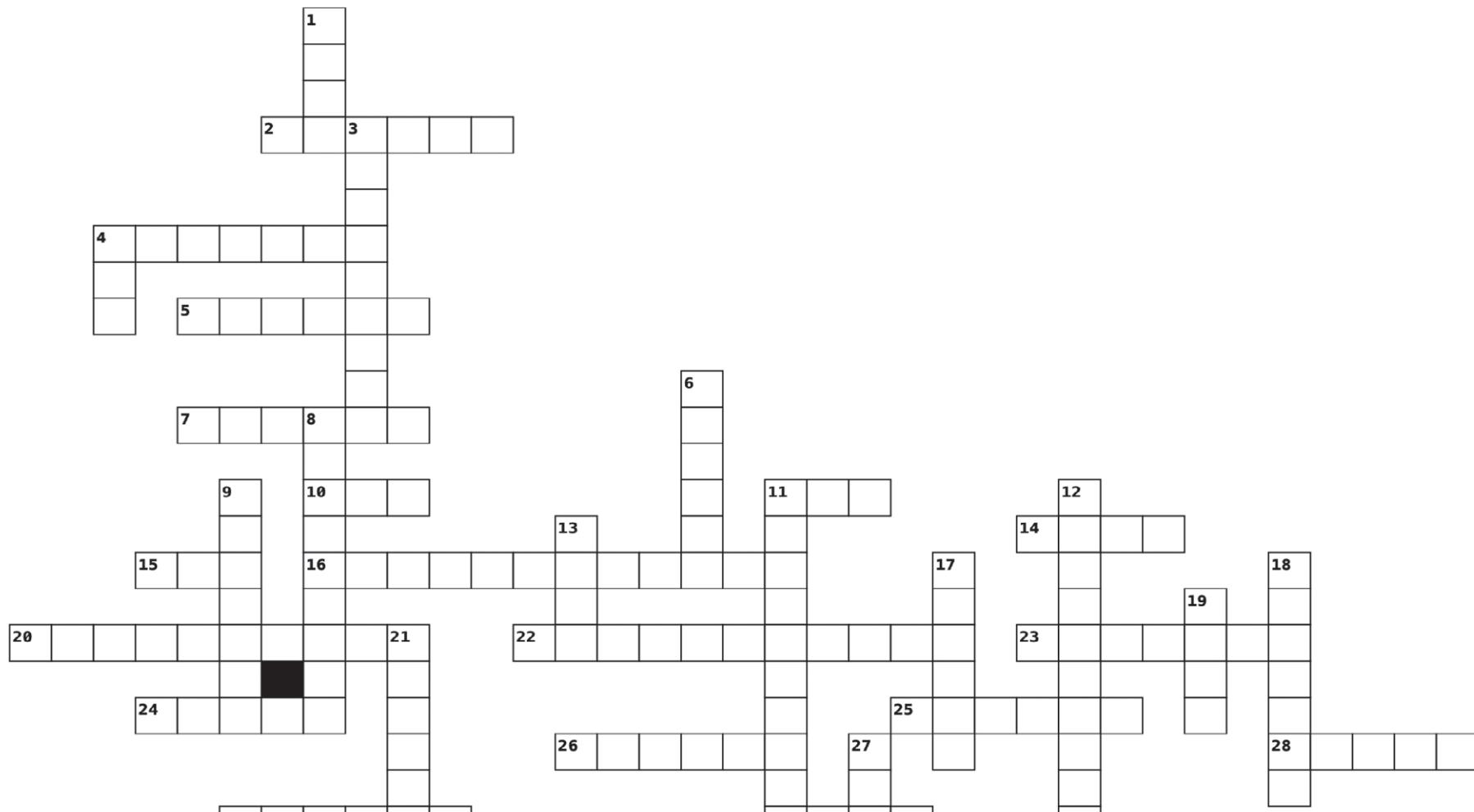
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THON GAMES

**Across**

2. Color worn by Dancer Relations Committee
4. 2024 top fundraising Commonwealth Campus
5. Day after THON when many skip class
7. Stands for 46 hours
10. TDC editor-in-chief Schafer
11. Current THON site
14. Largest residence hall
15. PSU student newspaper initis
16. THON's beneficiary (2 words)

20. End goal of college
22. College of ___: largest at University Park
23. Pommel horse guy Nedoroscik
24. 2024 top fundraising special interest org
25. Stadium across the street
26. Where hockey plays
28. PSU president Bendapudi
29. Submit assignments here
30. Nittany ___
31. World's largest student-run philanthropy

Down

1. THON theme: A Home For ___
3. Hourly dance (2 words)
4. 3-letter acronym; THON slogan
6. Super Bowl champ Barkley
8. Chickie's & Pete's delicacy
9. THON site; 1999-2007 (2 words)
11. Sport played in BJC
12. 2024 THON headline performer
13. Old ___
17. Penn State's conference (2 words)
18. ___ Lions: A capella group
19. Punxsutawney groundhog
21. What you're holding
27. Where dancers stand

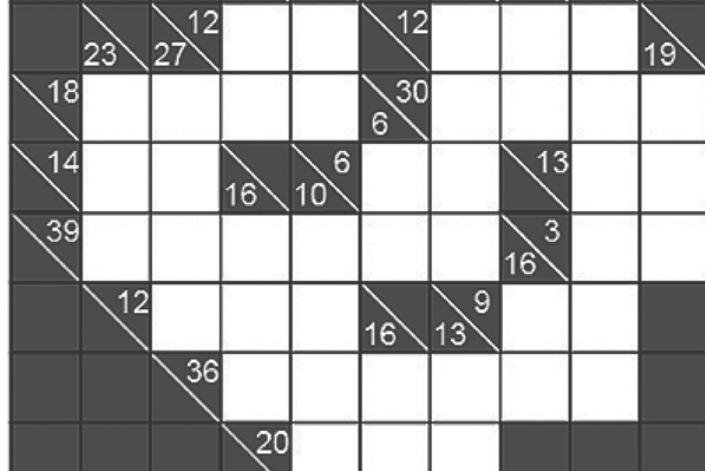
Scan to see crossword answers.



THON Word Search

Captain	Fundraise
Carnival	Greek
Committee	Line Dance
Dancer	Music
Donor	Pep Rally
Family	Talent Show
Final Four	THON
FTK	

Kakuro



The rules are easy:
A number above the diagonal line in a black square is the sum of the white squares to the right of it.
A number below the diagonal line is the sum of the white squares in the sequence below it.
You may only use the digits 1 to 9, and a digit can only be used once in any sequence.

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Sudoku



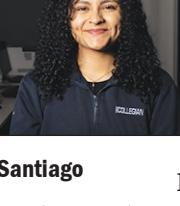
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Good luck to our Lifestyle Editor, Ritamarie Montagna: Dancer No. 245C!

MY VIEW | JADZIA SANTIAGO

4 lessons from 12 hours covering THON

Picture this: it's quiet, in the wee hours of a February night.



Santiago

Your roommate's just tucked themselves into bed. Flakes of snow fall gently outside.

Next to your head, your alarm goes off. You swing your legs out from under your covers, get dressed and ready, then sling your bag over your shoulder. It's time to go.

One year ago to the day I'm writing this column, I spent 12 collective hours reporting at THON for The Daily Collegian. Two shifts, five articles and approximately four hours of sleep later, I came out of it with lessons that I carry to this day.

Here are some of them.

People are better than you think, and you can make friends with anyone

If you keep up with the news, or like me at the time, are involved with the news, it's easy to become cynical. It might seem logical to start believing almost nobody is genuine, every act of charity is performative and ev-

erybody is working to make your life harder.

Two seconds covering THON teaches you otherwise.

Maybe it's the energy that THON provides, but whether it was 4 a.m. or noon, everyone I met was absolutely ecstatic to talk to me. When people get together to do something they genuinely believe in, it's obvious.

I shook hands with people I'd never normally come across in my campus life. Not only that, I was able to build camaraderie with the THON committee members I worked with, bonding over the fact that we were there to do a job through all the noise.

It was all because I kept an open mind and expressed a willingness to collaborate. I made an effort to shout my name over the music, ask everyone how they were doing, to treat everyone as an individual.

It carried me through my 12 hours, and it will carry me through the rest of my life.

You can do anything

I won't sugarcoat it — that weekend was HARD, as it is for so many people. It was part of the worst February of my life thus far.

Every weekend was another club meeting, conference or crisis. That month was out to grab me by the ankles and drag me down.

But like for so many others, THON proved to me that I could run faster.

Not to get too personal, but I've been made to feel incapable by multiple people throughout my life — friends, partners, teachers. THON taught me that I can do the things I know are worth it.

These days, I never let anyone make fun of me for my effort. I know that I'm here because I'm good at what I do, and I'm still standing because no matter what chases me, be it exhaustion, burnout or discouragement, I'm always going to be faster.

Some things are bigger than you

It was the afternoon of Day 2 when I had the opportunity to interview some Dancer Relations Committee members down on the floor.

So much of being a journalist is looking down — at a notebook, at your recording device, at your laptop. But between interviews, I took a second to look up.

I've never felt smaller in my life, and I'm 5-foot-3, so that's saying something. However, it wasn't a bad thing.

There was comfort in my smallness. When you're in college, it's easy to think the entire world rests on your shoulders, and if you breathe wrong, it'll fall.

But the world is so much bigger than you. As I looked up ... I can't even describe the scale of it, the feeling of that mass of people looking down, dancing, cheering.

But that mass was made up of individuals, all just doing their part to better the world.

Efforts, movements and events like THON all take more than one person, and as such, you don't need to carry the whole world, only your corner.

On the floor, feeling small, I realized I didn't have to carry the whole world. I only had to click open my pen, hit record on my phone and say, "Hi, my name is Jaz, what's your name? Tell me about you."

The sun rises. It always does

In the early morning hours toward the end of my first shift, I had to chase an article out of the

BJC entirely.

When I stepped outside, the sky was dyed purple with the sunrise. The snow had stopped falling, and the gentle breeze blew some flakes around and lifted my curls from my shoulders.

For just a minute, I stood there at the top of that scarily steep hill. And despite how exhausted I was, everything was beautiful.

As a new day reached State College, I found myself deeply aware of who I was: this capable, stubborn, 19-year-old thing. I didn't know where I was going exactly, and I still don't.

But like the mountains the sunlight was just peeking over, some things were bigger than me. No matter what, at the end of those 46 hours, everyone would step out of the BJC into a world made better.

And I had a job to do, only one thing I could do — get down to the bottom of that hill, and make some friends.

Jadzia Santiago is a columnist and DEI committee member for The Daily Collegian. She's a third-year double-majoring in English and communication arts and sciences. Email her at jas9280@psu.edu and follow her on [X](https://www.instagram.com/jadziaasantiago/).

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Cartoon by Nate Campbell

No way they top last year's performance

I don't know, I heard they went all out for this one

This land is your land...

This Machine Donates to THON

Cartoon by Ethan Capitano

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Muñoz family goes 'full circle'

By Emma Naysmith
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in 1995, Crystal Muñoz today celebrates 27 years of victory over cancer.

Muñoz said she embodied the highest white blood cell count Milton S. Hershey Medical Center had seen and experienced paralysis from the waist down. She was quickly introduced to THON and Four Diamonds, and her life was positively changed forever.

Muñoz recalls meeting Penn State students involved with THON at one of her first full days at the hospital. She was later paired with Phi Delta Theta and Theta Kappa Pi through the THON "Adopt-a-Family" program.

"One of the morale captains, he made me smile. And you know, I was 11 and pretty shy at the time. He did not have a THON family, so that's how I got paired with his fraternity," Muñoz said. "The Phi Delt brothers pretty much became my brothers. They knew more about my journey and my story and were there; it's the same with the girls at Theta Kappa Pi."

Muñoz today remains very close with that core group of individuals.

Attending her first THON Weekend in 1996 at the White Building, Muñoz remembers bringing a handful of disposable cameras and having a "blast."

"I remember walking in there for the first time and just being overwhelmed. Everybody was just high energy. I was shy, not knowing what to expect," Muñoz said.

"It was a little overwhelming at first, but after a couple of hours, you open up a little



Crystal Muñoz smiles with her daughter, Layla, during a previous THON. Layla, now a sophomore at Penn State Altoona, will dance this weekend in THON 2025.

Courtesy of Crystal Muñoz

bit — you know that it's a safe environment."

One of Muñoz's special THON memories is THON Weekend 1999, her first full year of being off of chemotherapy. After being excited the night before and not being able to sleep, Muñoz wrote a poem including her four years of THON slogans and gave it to the executive director.

"Unknown to me, (the director) was struggling with what to say to open up THON 1999, and he read my poem," Muñoz said. "That was pretty cool. First year in Rec Hall, having your poem read, it was pretty special."

In 2013, the Muñoz family was paired with what is today the Pi Beta Phi and Sigma Phi Epsilon Benefiting THON organization.

"Sigma Pi Phi Epsilon holds immense gratitude and admiration for our partnership with the Muñoz family. It's inspiring to see their children take initiative and make a meaningful impact through their involvement in both Mini-THON and Penn State THON," Sigma Phi Epsilon and Pi Beta Phi said in a statement. "Their dedication and positivity truly embody the heart and mission of THON, and we're proud to stand alongside them in this journey."

Muñoz is married to a THON volunteer alumni and is the mother of a blended family of seven. After being a student volunteer in 2024, Muñoz's oldest daughter, Layla, is dancing in THON Weekend 2025 on behalf of Altoona

Benefiting THON.

After attending her first THON at 11 months old, Layla, a second-year studying elementary education, has been immersed in THON culture for as long as she can remember. A special THON memory for both Muñoz and Layla is THON 2014, when Layla came to fully embrace the event and its true meaning.

"During Family Hour... it's very emotional, and I remember I took a picture because, when you're a mom, you want to capture moments and stills to look back on," Muñoz said. "I have the picture of it, and she's crying during the celebration of life video. And I was like, 'Oh, she gets it.'"

Layla said that weekend was also when she decided she want-

ed to dance after being inspired by a family friend who danced while being part of a THON family.

"Ever since then, it's always been a dream of mine to dance and THON," Layla said. "At first, I didn't even want to go to Penn State, and then once I made that decision, I was like, 'I'm gonna dance. I don't know what year it's going to be, but I'm going to dance.'"

While also dancing in support of her mom, Layla said her decision has grown since making her own THON connections and memories.

"My 'why' has now turned into doing it for the ones who have passed away and making sure that their memory lives on and that somebody is doing it for them," Layla said. "I made a connection with a family (who lives) in my home school district, and after I made that connection, that's just always been my 'why,' and I do it for them. I don't want any other families to have to live through that heartbreak."

Muñoz said this upcoming THON Weekend brings her experience "full circle" as she was at one point "fighting for (her) life" and is now a mother to thriving children. With Layla dancing, this is something she couldn't imagine at the time of diagnosis.

"I don't even know what this feeling is because this takes pride to all new levels," Muñoz said. "I take (in) every little moment, and it's a big moment to me. I take nothing for granted when it comes to them — this is pretty special."

To email reporter: eln5123@psu.edu.
Follow her on X @emnaysmith.

'She's thriving in life'

Gordon family shares experience with THON

By Emma Naysmith
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

In the words of her mother, Kira, Adley Gordon is an energetic, passionate and determined child.

Adley's father, Chad, said she's a "one of a kind" child. At age 4, Adley is also triumphant after completing her two-year cancer treatment journey. She rang the bell at Penn State Health Children's Hospital in June, less than a month after her final day of treatment.

Adley was diagnosed with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia in February 2022, right before her second birthday.

After the diagnosis, the Gordon family's lives changed as they adjusted to a new sense of normal and were introduced to Four Diamonds and THON, which Chad said has become a very special fixture within their family.

"Four Diamonds is just an absolute lifesaver," Chad said. "It's a peace of mind to our family to know that Adley still is seen even though she technically rang the bell and is done with treatment. We still utilize them and will be utilizing Four Diamonds for years and years to come."

The Gordon family attended their first THON Weekend in 2023, also signifying their first vacation since Adley's diagnosis.

In an interview her parents allowed her to participate in, Adley said her favorite part was playing with the balloons and playing "keepy uppy."

"Our favorite part as a family

"It's very special to us to have Four Diamonds, all the students, all of Penn State THON in our corner, and, of course, our organizations."

Chad Gordon
Adley's father

for Adley's Adventure and spent numerous occasions with the family including during THON Weekend."

Kira said being paired with student organizations has provided their family with an additional layer of support and has helped to make Adley feel "extra special."

"It's funny to see her running around playing at the fraternity house, but just watching those students interact with her, and she's just so comfortable with them," Kira said. "She loves every minute of playing with them, and it just brings joy to my heart to see them enjoying the time and her just having the time of her life."

Chad described the day of Adley's bell ringing as too important to put into words and a moment of seeing her live again.

"That moment is, it's right up there with watching her be born," Chad said. "To see her ring the bell, take her last dose of chemo, to just be there for her as she's completing one of the hardest and most challenging things that she will ever encounter."

About one year from the beginning of Adley's treatment, Chad created an Instagram and Facebook page with the username "AdleysAdventure" that features posts about Adley's story and cancer journey. Today, the accounts combined consist of over 12,000 followers.

"It was more to connect to other families and really hopefully get guidance for ourselves, but then we found ourselves on the other end of that and giving guidance to other families too," Chad said. "It was a great experience, and she'll continue it and let everybody know how she's thriving in life."

Kira said she wants Adley to be a nurse or doctor when she grows up, and Chad said he thinks becoming a veterinarian with her love of animals would be cool — Adley said she wants to be a "teenager" when she grows up.

"It's also good knowing she has the opportunity to do these adventures if she wants to — it's her choice," Kira said. "She gets to do that through all the support and love that we've had. She's been given these opportunities and she gets to have the autonomy to decide."

To email reporter: eln5123@psu.edu.
Follow her on X @emnaysmith.



Jonus Wetzel and Stella, a former THON Family Relations captain, pose for a photo at Taco Bell in 2023.

'We've been blessed'

Wetzel family shares story

By Claire Huss
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Members of the THON Family Relations committee spend time getting to know families and children in attendance by entertaining them long into the 46-hour dance marathon, according to Family Relations Captain Sidney Cohen.

Cohen, a fourth-year studying elementary education, said she recalls meeting Jonus at THON 2024 and bonding while playing games.

"I remember we played hide-and-seek forever," Cohen said.

Wetzel said she expects her family to return to THON for years to come.

"I have nothing but positive things to say about literally every single person that we came into contact with," Wetzel said.

Last August, Jonus began T-cell infusion therapy, a type of cancer treatment that includes collecting a patient's immune cells and growing them in a lab before reinjection. In the last five days of September, Jonus also underwent chemotherapy treatment.

Jonus's latest spinal tap on Oct. 28 showed no evidence of disease or B cells, according to Wetzel.

"All signs point to remission for right now," Wetzel said.

The community and support system the Wetzels said they have gained from THON lasted far beyond the 46 hours they spent in the Bryce Jordan Center.

"Had it not been for THON and all the work they do, we would have never met the people who called and texted while we were in Philadelphia and in this past month," Wetzel said. "THON means more to us than we could ever put into words. We've been blessed."

To email reporter: ch7005@psu.edu.
Follow her on X @clairehuss13.



The Gordon family speaks during the Final Four hours of the 52nd THON at the Bryce Jordan Center on Feb. 18, 2024 in University Park, Pa.

Tyler Mantz/Collegian file photo

I Alley rocks Final Four

By Katie Herron
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Previously known as J-Time, the band I Alley is made up of four current and past Penn State students who performed together at the THON Showcase this year, and will perform again THON Weekend.

Joe Downs, a member of I Alley, said the band started playing together last year.

"We started for the THON Showcase last year, and since then, we play every once in a while together," Downs, a third-year studying data sciences, said. "We're all good friends, so we just get together and enjoy playing."

Downs described the band's sound as "upbeat, feel good, acoustic songs." His favorite part of being involved is watching all their practice pay off, and he said "collaborating kind of came naturally" to the group.

"From the beginning of when we start practicing until the end, just seeing the growth and seeing everything come together," Downs said. "Then just enjoying the final product."

The relationships between the members runs deeper than just the band. Downs and his bandmate, Brian Joslin, are cousins, and the others have been friends since childhood.

"We've all known each other our whole life," Downs said.

The name of the band, I Alley, comes from a place close to the bandmates' hearts.

"Brian Joslin lived on that street last year, and that was kind of the first house where we would practice together and play," Downs said.

Joslin, a fourth-year studying agribusiness management, described the band as a "fun, vibrant group" that fits together well.

Joslin believes performing at Penn State is an incredible experience because he is surrounded by friends and peers.

"Having all your buddies around is probably the best part of it," Joslin said. "Just knowing you have people that actually care and listen to your music is always a good feeling."

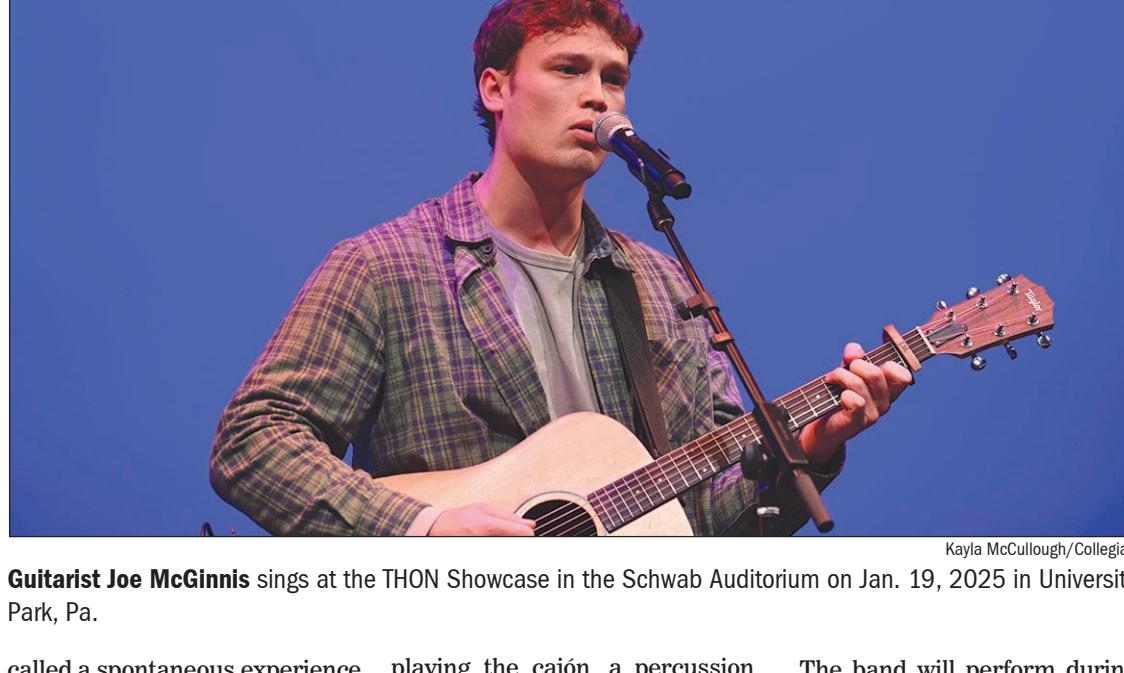
Downs also values the Penn State community's support throughout the band's journey.

"A lot of the time when we perform, we'll have friends in the crowd, and we have supportive families," Downs said. "The whole thing's awesome, just getting to play here in this community, it's a lot of support and fun times."

Joe McGinnis thinks that playing in a college town like Penn State allows I Alley to cater to its audience easily.

"It's easy to pick out your songs because you know your audience — everyone's going to be in their 20s," McGinnis, a third-year studying accounting, said. "It makes it a little bit easier."

McGinnis said practice is an excuse to hang out with and spend time with his friends, which he



Kayla McCullough/Collegian

Guitarist Joe McGinnis sings at the THON Showcase in the Schwab Auditorium on Jan. 19, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

called a spontaneous experience.

"We practice two weeks before whatever fundraiser we're doing, and then that's it," McGinnis said.

McGinnis said the band draws inspiration from Billy Joel, but his love for music began after seeing his church's guitar group.

"I wanted to do something like that. I took guitar lessons and played, played, played," McGinnis said.

The fourth member of the band, Greg Kerrigan, graduated from Penn State last year and is now touring with a heavy metal band.

During performances with I Alley, Kerrigan is known for

playing the cajón, a percussion instrument shaped like a box.

"There's a difference between the three of us playing and then us three and Kerrigan coming in on the cajón," McGinnis said. "It's really uplifting."

Although I Alley is currently focused on its upcoming performance at THON, the members are open to other opportunities to perform that may head their way, including supporting Downs during some of his solo shows.

"Downs plays a lot at Cafe 210 West and A's Pub, and I get up every once in a while for a couple of songs," Joslin said.

The band will perform during the Final Four hours of THON, which is when Four Diamonds families share their stories. McGinnis said I Alley will sing "Angels Among Us" by Alabama in what will be an "awesome, special moment."

"We're looking forward to playing during the Final Four," McGinnis said. "We want to make it a very special moment because it's pretty much the culmination of the whole fundraiser and what it's all about."

To email reporter: kah6798@psu.edu.
Follow her on X at [@ktherron137](https://twitter.com/ktherron137).



Tyler Mantz/Collegian file photo

The Singing Lions perform during the Final Four hours of THON 2024 at the Bryce Jordan Center on Feb. 18, 2024 in University Park, Pa.

Singing Lions take to THON stage

By Emma Strickling
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

The Singing Lions, Penn State's premier and only show choir, has had the opportunity to perform in the final four hours of THON for the past three years.

Lindsey Davidson, THON chair and treasurer for The Singing Lions, said preparing for THON takes place all year.

"We try to incorporate something regarding THON every week, whether it's teaching our new members about our families or having fundraisers," Davidson, a third-year studying forensic science, said. "As we were singing and rehearsing, we were making bracelets and ribbons for the fundraiser happening in a few weeks."

The organization is paired with the Broadwaters, the Barretts and the Bomboys. Davidson said spending time with these THON families has been a really rewarding experience.

"When we were leaving visiting the Bomboy family, I had Lacey's father, Rob, come up to me and say, 'You just made Lacey's entire day and entire month, this means so much to her,'" Davidson said. "That's why I'm doing this — that's why I'm sure all of us do this — is that we are able to support those who have gone through something so horrible. I can't even imagine what they have gone through, but we're able to be there for them and support them every single day."

Cameron Powell, THON chair and music director for the Singing Lions, said the group normally starts the first few rehearsals with the songs they plan to perform at the philanthropy event.

"We had worked on our THON song throughout the summer and had it done by our first rehearsal," Powell, a third-year studying elementary and early childhood education, said. "We are

always singing (the songs), talking about the meaning and doing fundraisers."

Powell also said she feels lucky about how much the Singing Lions are connected with their families.

"We're so lucky to have three amazing families that love us just as much as we love them, and we consider them our family now," Powell said. "Every single member of our group just loves THON, and it's very nice to have that experience because I know a lot of organizations can't have that."

Kaleb Meyer, vice president and family relations chair for The Singing Lions, said the organization's two biggest performances are THON auditions and performance.

"The most special thing is when we all gather in a circle together and turn the lights off," Meyer, a third-year studying special education, said. "It doesn't matter how many notes you get right, it matters how you feel. I think that is one of the most powerful things that I have ever done in my time with this group."

Meyer said the Singing Lions are fortunate to perform in both their regular concerts and sing during THON.

"I would say there is no Singing Lions without THON," Meyer said. "We perform, we THON."

Kelsey Miller, family relations chair and THON dancer for The Singing Lions, said performing at THON is such a "beautiful and sacred moment."

"We have performed at the Final Four for the past three years, and everytime we get on that stage the room is silent," Miller, a fourth-year studying elementary and early childhood education, said. "I have never been in a room with that many people who are so focused and so caring about something, and you can just feel that energy when you walk on stage. It's electric, and it just means the world to be up

there during that time."

After her aunt's death from cancer in December, Miller said she decided that she wanted to dance at this year's THON — not only for her aunt, but for the Singing Lions' THON families and for her mom.

"It means everything to me, and I am honored that I was chosen this year," Miller said.

Emma Hogan, president of the Singing Lions and THON dancer, said the most powerful thing about performing at THON is how tangible the feeling of love is in the room.

"This group of people is like my family and my closest friends, so I always feel close with them, but in that moment, it feels like you are one big unit," Hogan, a fourth-year studying elementary and childhood education, said. "We have our families in the front row, and we can feel the love from them. We can feel the love from everybody who's just there that we don't know. I think it's just one of those special moments that is once in a lifetime to have that many people in a room and feel that kind of support."

Hogan said getting to dance in THON has made her feel closer to the Singing Lions' THON families.

"I think one of the most special parts is we're representing our girls, but we are also representing 24 of the best people I know and all the alumni that came before us," Hogan said.

"That is such an honor because this is the most incredible group of people, and to get to stand for them, that's my favorite part; getting to be a representative of all that love and joy that we stand for."

To email reporter: eks5726@psu.edu.

Guide to committees

By Jocelyn Bilker
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Mark your calendars — THON Weekend is coming up quickly, from Friday Feb. 21 through Sunday Feb. 23. This annual event unites the Penn State community against childhood cancer, raising both money and awareness for the cause.

Communications

The Communications Committee is your go-to liaison for all things THON. It educates Penn State students, faculty and staff on how they can get involved and empowers them to make an impact. Look for them in green shirts during THON Weekend.

Dancer Relations

The Dancer Relations Committee ensures that student dancers have a safe, supported and unforgettable experience. From logistics to emotional care, they've got dancers covered. Catch them in yellow shirts all weekend.

Donor and Alumni Relations

With two branches — Alumni Engagement and Development — this committee works to build relationships with Penn State alumni and expand THON's donor base. They share fundraising opportunities and campaigns to help spread THON's mission. You'll see them in royal blue shirts during THON.

Entertainment

The Entertainment Committee delivers top-notch performances and audio/visual experiences to keep the energy high all weekend. Get ready for exciting shows, all brought to you by the crew wearing orange shirts.

Family Relations

Dedicated to ensuring Four Diamonds families have the best experience possible year-round. The Family Relations Committee works with other committees to keep families at the heart of the event and prioritize their well-being. Spot them in light blue shirts throughout the weekend.

Finance

The Finance Committee is

behind the scenes, managing

donations and ensuring every-

thing is processed securely.

Their work is crucial in finaliz-

ing THON's yearly total. You'll

see them in dark green shirts.

To email reporter: jpb6798@psu.edu.

Follow her on X at [@meteorology_joc](https://twitter.com/meteorology_joc).

throughout the event by securing food and drink donations, the Hospitality Committee serves the THON community in pink shirts.

Merchandise

From T-shirts to sweatpants, the Merchandise Committee helps fundraise through the sale of THON products. They'll be wearing light pink shirts while offering items for sale throughout the weekend.

OPPerations

The OPPerations Committee ensures a safe and smooth event experience, managing logistics, security and transforming the Bryce Jordan Center into THON's home. They're also committed to THON's sustainability efforts. Find them in navy blue shirts.

Public Relations

THON's voice comes from the Public Relations Committee, which spreads awareness on local, state and national levels. Their goal is to inspire the public to join the fight for a cure. Look for them in purple shirts.

Rules and Regulations

Split into Event Safety and Fundraising Safety branches, the Rules and Regulations Committee ensures a secure, ethical environment at all THON events. From logistics to safety protocols, they're always on top of the rulebook. Both branches will wear red shirts during THON.

Special Events

The Special Events Committee keeps the spirit of THON alive year-round by organizing creative events designed to unite the THON community. Catch them in maroon shirts during the weekend.

Supply Logistics

The Supply Logistics Committee is responsible for gathering in-kind donations for THON events and ensuring everything is ready for THON Weekend. In their lime green shirts, they're key to keeping the event running smoothly.

Technology

Providing vital software and technical support to THON organizations, the Technology Committee helps advance the mission with cutting-edge tech. They'll be sporting light green shirts during THON Weekend.

To email reporter: jkp6798@psu.edu.

Follow her on X at [@meteorology_joc](https://twitter.com/meteorology_joc).

The power of pink

The history of a \$5,000 check: Penn State Pink Zone's long-lasting impact

By Noah Aberegg
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Editor's Note: Pink Zone is not affiliated with THON.

It all started with a \$5,000 check given to each Big Ten women's basketball team to help improve attendance.

Some teams used the money to buy T-shirts to bring fans in or simply handed tickets out for free. But former Penn State coach Rene Portland wanted to do more.

"(Portland) really wanted to use it as seed money to do something special," Jennifer James, a former Lady Lions manager and current associate athletic director for events, said.

Through communication with Wisconsin's women's basketball coach, Portland decided on the idea of buying white uniforms with pink trim for Penn State and pink uniforms for Wisconsin in support of breast cancer.

While James said Wisconsin ultimately backed out because it was unsure of the idea and had never won in the Bryce Jordan Center, the Lady Lions filed with the NCAA to wear the uniforms themselves, becoming the first Division I program to wear pink uniforms in support of breast cancer.

"We approached Nike (about ordering uniforms), and Nike actually wanted no part of it," James said. "It was just a local equipment company that got the jersey sizes, got the short sizes and put these together for us."

Since then, the Lady Lions have hosted their annual Pink Zone game, honoring breast cancer survivors and remembering those who have died.

While the uniform idea began in Happy Valley, teams across the country had begun wearing pink shoelaces in support of Kay Yow, the NC State women's basketball coach, whose breast cancer progressed that year.

As Penn State's pink uniforms grew in popularity, the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, which had been backing Yow for several years, began supporting the Lady Lions. The WBCA started the Pink Zone and its own organization, the Kay Yow Cancer Fund.

During her stints as head



Maddy Perez/Collegian file photo

Breast cancer survivors pose for a picture during halftime at the women's basketball game against Michigan in the Bryce Jordan Center on Feb. 3, 2024

coach of both Saint Francis and Providence, former Penn Stater Susan Robinson Fruchtl saw the impact of Penn State's Pink Zone and the Kay Yow Cancer Fund nationwide.

"I remember being at the Final Four, and they started a Play4Kay 5K," Robinson Fruchtl said.

"I remember (analyst) Debbie Antonelli peddling like one of those little taxi peddlers, and she had Yow (in the back) with everyone running so she could be a part."

With the help of staff assistant and breast cancer survivor Mary McCahan, the Lady Lions built up the Pink Zone game over the years, until it eventually became too much for just Penn State. Pink Zone became its own nonprofit, helping support breast cancer patients and survivors in the Happy Valley area.

Now, the Pink Zone game is just a small moment in the realm of fundraising and support for Pink Zone, with golf tournaments, support funds and more. Through each community interaction, story of success and conversation with patients and survivors, Pink Zone is motivated to keep doing more.

"Anytime you hear good stories and good outcomes, you're motivated to work harder," Trish Fulvio, the executive director of Pink Zone, said. "Those stories of success just make me want to work harder to create more of those stories."

Knowing that the financial help from the organization helps empower those with breast cancer pushes Fulvio to work even more with the organization.

"Recently, we had a woman we helped through the Direct Support Fund who told me that when she was diagnosed, it paralyzed her from the standpoint of fear," Fulvio said.

"Her fear was not of the disease, but what would happen to her family. Would they be able to sustain themselves financially?"

The Direct Support Fund, Pink Zone's latest initiative, helps pay the nonmedical bills for cancer patients.

According to Fulvio, studies have shown that people in financial distress are disadvantaged when facing cancer. Pink Zone hopes the Direct Support Fund not only helps the affected families, but also with the cancer itself.

"The mind is very much part of the treatment, and so what they tell me most often is that if they're able to exhale, just take a breath and concentrate on their healing, that's the best thing I hear about what we're doing," Fulvio said.

Since coach Carolyn Kieger took over the Lady Lions in 2019, she's worked to make the Pink Zone game a moment players think about all year.

"The legacy here speaks volumes for this community and what it means for fighting toward a cause bigger than basketball

and giving back to the community," Kieger said. "I think it speaks toward our game, it speaks toward the State College community, and also Penn State that it's been such a big deal for so long, not only for survivors, but caretakers and everyone fighting for something bigger than themselves."

Not only does Kieger talk about the Pink Zone all year, but she really brings the topic into play during the summer and right before the game, drilling the initiative into the players' minds.

During the offseason, the Lady Lions have "pride topics" where they learn about making themselves better people, community members and students. For Kieger's squad, the Pink Zone game has always been one of the favorites, working to make the community better.

"(Kieger's) a force, and she's just so committed to what we do," Fulvio said. "She'll basically tell me, 'What do you need from us, what do you need from Lady Lion basketball?' They just love being involved in something bigger than they are."

This year, graduate guard Alli Campbell was named the Kay Yow Servant Leader for Penn State, embodying the characteristics of Yow, which the Kay Yow Cancer Fund website describes as "people with a servant's spirit and a commitment to selfless leadership both on and off the court and athletic field."

"It's just an honor because it's just so much bigger than basketball," Campbell said. "Honestly, I teared up when they named me our servant leader of the team, for them to view me as their leader every day. That's just what I strive to be."

Through Campbell's four seasons with the blue and white, she's shown up to Pink Zone events, lightening the mood as she shares basketball stories with patients and takes their thoughts away from their diagnosis to a more fun topic.

As the most tenured Lady Lion, Campbell has experienced the Pink Zone game many times, helping to motivate the team to push toward one goal.

"It means a lot to me, personally, and is such a cool event to be a part of," Campbell said. "The BJC is pink, and we have so many people that come back and watch this game and support it, representing those who have fought and most who have survived."

Over the last several years, the game has provided some of the highest attendance in the BJC and has also been paired with other events. In the past, the Pink Zone game has fallen on Alumni Day, Senior Day and a game in which the Lady Lions clinched the Big Ten title.

"It was (forward) Julia Trogele's senior day, and people were wondering why she wanted to share Senior Day with (the) Pink Zone (game)," James said. "(Her answer) was because it's for such a great cause and she loves pink, so it was perfect."

With Pink Zone's 20th anniversary on the horizon, Fulvio hopes to increase the attendance of both fans and survivors at the game, with the hope of breaking the 2014 Pink Zone mark of 698 survivors in attendance, as well as having more people willing to ask for help.

"There are many people who need help but don't want to ask for it," Fulvio said. "Getting to those people and trying to convince them it's OK to be vulnerable. Sometimes the strongest thing that you need is to be vulnerable."

To email reporter: nida5168@psu.edu.
Follow him on X @aberegg_noah.

THON traditions

THON captains share their favorite traditions

By Elsa Brumbaugh
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

THON captains are an integral part of the organization, leading the 16 student-run committees tasked with planning and executing activities.

Jordyn Sanders serves as a product design captain on the Merchandising Committee.

The team designs merch for events like THON 5K, 100 Days 'Til THON and the THON Family Carnival, as well as the fall collection, the Athletics T-shirt and the THON Weekend collection.

Sanders, a fourth-year studying architectural engineering, said she was motivated to become involved with THON her first year through the Club Cross Country's Miles for Smiles fundraiser, as well as through her personal experiences with childhood cancer through a friend from high school. Later, in her second year at Penn State, she joined the Hospitality Committee.

"I feel like I've come to learn so much about the families and how much THON supports them," Sanders said. "Being a product design captain I feel is a really special position, because when we aren't at Penn State and when we aren't necessarily doing things for THON, but we wear THON merchandise—that's how we spread the word."

Sanders has participated in plenty of activities during her three years involved with THON, but her favorite tradition is one that only those in her committee get to partake in.

"One of the activities we do as a committee is we have a ball of yarn, and we pass it around and talk about why we THON," Sanders said. "As we pass the yarn around and they continue to cross, it just shows how connected we are. Despite all of our differences and how we come from different places, have different positions, we all can come together for this cause."

While this activity is specific to her committee, Sanders said

there are plenty of other fun traditions related to THON that anyone can participate in.

"I know that for most, THON Weekend is the big one—it's just a place where we all come together," Sanders said. "But I do think events like the 5K and 100 Days 'Til THON also mean a lot and continue our mission throughout the year, just the same way that cancer isn't just one weekend, it's years or months for some."

Juliet Berzins, a fourth-year studying human development and family studies, said she was inspired by her older sister's involvement.

"My sister came to Penn State four years before I did, so when I was a freshman in high school, she was a freshman in college," Berzins said. "I watched the entire live stream with my family sitting around me in our living room, and I was like, 'I cannot believe this is something she's involved in.'"

Berzins said her experience with THON has changed a lot since taking on the product design captain position.

"As a committee member, you get to see all this amazing stuff. Being able to really put in the work and see it come to life is a really cool feeling," Berzins said. "Especially as a product design captain, you get to see all the merchandise around campus, which is one of the craziest feelings in the world."

Berzins said that although there's so many different traditions, her favorite is attending the Family Carnival.

"I think that whole day is so incredibly spectacular and special; I just treasure it so much," Berzins said. "At the end of it, we show the THON 2025 logo, and I think that was one of the coolest things to witness in person."

Berzins said her most memorable moment regarding THON came during her second year.

"You don't even need to be the top fundraiser, it doesn't even matter if you don't make the board, but seeing how much you

all come together as a community, it's a really awesome feeling," Berzins said.

Lindsay Leber is also a captain on the Merchandising Committee, specializing in distribution.

Leber, a fourth year studying geosciences, said she enjoys that her position allows her to work directly with all 16 THON committees.

"There's four of us that make up distribution, and we sort and count and make sure that everyone has the correct shirts," Leber said. "Basically, without us, the volunteers wouldn't have shirts to work on THON Weekend."

Leber said she was first introduced to THON when her high school in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, hosted a MiniTHON. She spent her first two years of college at Penn State Harrisburg and started her involvement with THON there.

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A student pulls items out of her fanny pack at THON on Feb. 17, 2023 in the Bryce Jordan Center.

What to pack

By Xandra Adams-Dennis
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

If you walk into any Penn State oriented shop right now, you'll find sweatbands, tennis balls, clear bags, fanny packs and neon crew socks lined up by the register.

They're not for starring in an aerobics video from the 1980s, they're last-minute THON essentials.

Whether you're dancing on the floor for 46 hours or challenging yourself to stay and observe for as long as possible, here are some things you might not think to bring for THON.

Wet wipes

I know the shame of carrying everything in a big clear bag might make it harder to carry these, but I haven't seen this on any THON essentials lists.

Spending an entire weekend eating nothing but chicken tenders, free snacks and drinking a bunch of caffeine sounds like a digestive tract disaster.

If your only time to sit will be using the bathroom, I think making it a luxury experience is worth the humiliation of everybody knowing you might poop in the BJC.

Extra deodorant and body spray

If you've never been to THON,

there's a smell that starts to form late on Saturday night.

As Sunday goes on and the

event draws to a close, it only intensifies in the stands.

One way we can all combat this odor is bringing a couple of hygiene products to keep everything in line. Showering can be taxing for someone who's over-saturated with tasks to keep the show running, so a quick swipe of deodorant or a spray of a good body mist can do wonders.

A traditional watch

There is no big clock in the BJC, and time can start to escape someone who's standing for so long and starting to get delirious.

For those working long shifts in the stands, a traditional watch that doesn't require charging can keep you grounded when you start losing track of time and want to preserve your phone battery.

Extra socks and comfortable shoes

A fresh sock and a bedroom slipper can do wonders for ankle-sock clad, sweaty feet that are stuffed and tied into sneakers being worn way longer than they're designed to.

Nike can market its sport-technology all it wants; nothing will beat a pair of fuzzy socks.

THON is a marathon, not a race. Bringing some comfort from home can make the experience more enjoyable.

To email reporter: xqa5022@psu.edu.

Follow her on X @xandraye.

RELIVE THE ROAD TO THON



Matthew Kemper/Collegian

The For The Kids letters are displayed during the THON Family Carnival on Dec. 8, 2024.



Samantha Oropesa/Collegian

THON reveals the 2025 Dream Forward Campaign total during the 100 Days 'Til THON celebration on Nov. 13, 2024.



Matthew Kemper/Collegian

THON 2025 reveals its logo during the Family Carnival in the Multi-Sport Facility. The THON 2025 theme, "A Home for Hope," was revealed at the 2024 Homecoming Parade.



Kate Hildebrand/Collegian

Donors get their hair buzzed at the THON No Hair, Don't Care event in the HUB-Robeson Center on Feb. 19, 2025.



Ryan Copeland/Collegian file photo

Gus Platt, a first-year studying engineering sciences and mechanics, crosses the finish line at the THON 5K.



Esteban Marenco/Collegian

Donors get their hair shaved off during THON's No Hair, Don't Care fundraiser in the HUB-Robeson Center.



Matthew Kemper/Collegian

A mother and baby meet Sir Millard during the THON Family Carnival in the Multi-Sport Facility.

46 hours, no sitting, no sleeping — all For The Kids



Samantha Oropesa/Collegian

A student places her painted fingerprint on a sign during 100 Days 'Til THON. The Dream Forward campaign raised \$1,926,461.87 for Four Diamonds.



Kate Hildebrand/Collegian

A donor laughs as he gets his hair buzzed during the THON No Hair, Don't Care event in the HUB-Robeson Center.