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FEATURED

Souderton Area High School's SouderTHON dances to fight cancer

School community aims to raise tens of thousands of dollars with event

By Bob Keeler bkeeler@21st-centurymedia.com @bybobkeeler on Twitter Feb 27, 2017



Bob Raines — Digital First Media

Teens have fun dancing under black lights and strobe lights during SouderTHON at Souderton Area High School Friday, Feb. 24.

FRANCONIA >> Megan Derstine was only halfway through a long day, but she was looking forward to what was still to come.

SouderTHON, Souderton Area High School's 12-hour-long "no-sitting, no-sleeping, movement marathon" officially went from 6 p.m. Feb. 24 to 6 a.m. Feb. 25, but the day actually started much earlier.

"We've been here since 7 a.m.," Derstine, a senior at the high school and vice president of the student council, said as she helped collect the admission fee from families coming to the "community hour," (which was actually 6:30 to 9 p.m. Feb. 24).

"It's going to be like a 24-hour day for us," Derstine said.

About 700 high school students were signed up to take part in SouderTHON, a little more than twice as many as two years ago, when SouderTHON was first held, she said.

That time, SouderTHON raised \$33,000, Amy Tarlo, student council co-adviser, said. This year's goal was \$50,000. The proceeds went to benefit the Peter Powerhouse Foundation (peterpowerhouse.org) and For Pete's Sake (takeabreakfromcancer.org), both of which are involved in helping individuals and families battling cancer. The Peter Powerhouse Foundation was started by cancer survivor Peter Zucca, now a seventh-

grader at Indian Valley Middle School. For Pete's Sake Cancer Respite Foundation was formerly known as Crossing the Finish Line.

"We're pairing with two local organizations because we really want to give back to families that are in our community," Kristen Gibbs, SouderTHON's student chairperson, said in a promotional video.

Along with doubling the number of dancers, the community hour participation was also a lot more, Tarlo and Derstine said.



At about 7 p.m., with people still arriving, an estimated 1,700 people were there, Derstine said. Two years ago, there were probably less than 500 during the entire community time, she said.

"We have so much school spirit this year; it's unreal," Derstine said.

Activities for the community hour filled the gyms, cafeteria, auditorium and the first-floor main hallway and featured a chance to meet some favorite characters, craft tables, face painting, carnival games, a moonbounce, dancing and several sports activities.

All of the school's student clubs played a part in helping with SouderTHON, Tarlo said.

About 50 teachers, working in shifts, volunteered to help out at the overnight event, with four administrators and a half-dozen security officers also on board, she said.

"It takes a team," Tarlo said.

Although the high school students are the ones in the marathon, they're not the only ones involved in SouderTHON, she said.

"Every elementary school had us in an assembly and the high school kids told them what it was about," Tarlo said.

"It's hard to find a community event that is really for K through 12," she said. "This is really a great event for all students."

SouderTHON is modeled after Penn State's 46-hour THON, which the previous weekend raised more than \$10 million to fight pediatric cancer.

With several hours to go until the end of SouderTHON, Derstine said she was ready for the rest of the night.

"I'm a little tired, because, like I said, I've been here for awhile," she said, "but I'm so excited."

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