The Dancing Doesn't Stop

Update: After this story was published, Carolina for the Kids held a successful Virtual Dance Marathon, raising more than $250,000 for UNC Children’s Hospital during the event.

Set up that iPhone and get those “Renegade” and “Say So” dances ready, because the UNC Dance Marathon is going to be a virtual event this year.

Leaders of Carolina for the Kids, the UNC-Chapel Hill student organization that puts on the Dance Marathon fundraiser to benefit UNC Children’s Hospital, said they are moving the party online in accordance with UNC’s efforts to mitigate the spread of coronavirus, and they want people to participate any way they can.

“We’re going to make the most of it,” said Kalina MacKay, who serves as publicity chair for the group. “We can’t be together in person, but there are other ways to make it happen. I know the situations that many of the children and families are in at the hospital is so unpredictable and they never give up, so we’re channeling that right now. We need to not give up.”

A signature spring event at UNC, the Dance Marathon has taken place every year at UNC since 1999 and usually packs hundreds of dancers into Fetzer Gym for an all-day, all-night party. Participants pledge to keep moving for 24 hours in exchange for donations to the hospital.

This year, CFTK wants people to participate in a 24-hour social media campaign that will be led primarily through the group’s Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts. CFTK will be sharing videos, graphics and other content ideas for users to share to their social networks to help fundraise.

And, in Dance Marathon spirit, participants will be encouraged to share video of their own dance moves. “We’ll be asking people to submit videos doing TikTok dance challenges, so dancing will definitely be a part of this for those who want to do that,” MacKay said.
All social media content for the Dance Marathon can be tagged with #UNCVDM2020, and the festivities are open to everyone. The group has created a Google document with information on how to participate.

The group’s quick move to a virtual event came together following announcements from the University that events of 50 or more people on campus would be canceled. A chain of dejected group texts circulated among CFTK leaders, and the group initially settled on simply posting videos and other content they had created to social media as a way of recognizing the hard work of their members throughout the year.

But as MacKay and CFTK creative media chair Matthew Gibson began working on the materials they wanted to share, an idea struck them: As long as their group was posting to social media, why not just turn it into an event and ask everyone to join?

?”It was heartbreaking not to be able to have the marathon the way we were used to, but then we saw a way to have a presence,” Gibson said. “We were like, ‘Alright, we’re gonna do this!’?”

Even with the altered format of the event, CFTK executive director Michelle Cooley said the group has several objectives in mind. First and foremost is its mission to benefit patients and families at UNC Children’s Hospital. CFTK asked those who set event fundraising goals to still do their best to meet them, and all participants to try to raise at least $24 for the 24 hours that they would have been dancing.

Cooley also sees an opportunity to bring the UNC community together at a time where people may feel disconnected from their friends and loved ones. Cooley, a senior, said it’s a chance for her friends to fall back on a familiar and fun event even as many aren’t sure about whether they will have a chance to see classmates in-person again before departing Chapel Hill.

?”Everything seems flipped upside down and turned around in every direction, especially for seniors,” Cooley said. “We hope that this is a chance to maintain continuity instead. Hopefully it brightens people’s outlook and gives them a way to come together.”