

# IMPACT REPORT



THON™

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## Our Mission

THON™ is a student-run philanthropy committed to enhancing the lives of children and families impacted by childhood cancer. Our mission is to provide emotional, and financial support, spread awareness and ensure funding for critical research - all in pursuit of a cure.

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# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear THON Supporter,

My name is Regina Duesler, and I have the pleasure of serving as the Executive Director for THON 2020. During my time at Penn State, I've had the immense privilege to play a role in THON and witness the impact THON has had on over 4,000 families during their battle with childhood cancer.

*“THON creates light for families in their darkest moments, and we stand in solidarity with our families far beyond their journey with cancer.”*

Over the past 10 years, THON has transformed its fundraising model and has grown in the areas of professionalism, year-round events, and national coverage. We have legitimized THON as a philanthropy through strategic messaging, appeals, and fundraising techniques such as gift matching and recurring giving. We work very closely with Penn State Development in these efforts, and are grateful to be supported by such a robust division of the University. We have also added events to enhance our yearlong efforts such as the THON Kickoff Celebration in September, the Logo



Reveal Party in December, and the THON Showcase in January to ensure our THON Volunteers feel immersed in the magic of THON all year long.

These improvements and this growth would not be possible without donors like you. As a THON Supporter, you play an integral role in kids' lives. Because of you, kids can grow up and live out their dreams.

In addition, Penn State students can experience the true definition of community and selflessness through THON. We develop as leaders, philanthropists, and stewards of this worthy cause. This is all thanks to your support.

Thank you, for all that you have done, and continue to do for THON. I sincerely appreciate the time, talent, and treasure you have poured into THON. Your legacy is woven into THON's story, and your generosity will allow this story to be perpetuated and developed for years to come.

THON is committed to finding a cure, and we are honored to have you with us on our journey.

For The Kids™,

**Regina Duesler**  
**THON 2020 Executive Director**



Often we find our dreams and hopes way up in the sky. What makes a goal of this size one day attainable is the group of individuals that journey alongside us. This shared experience is one that changes the lives of both people and groups involved. No goal is too farfetched and no challenge is impossible to solve so long as we approach it together. Much like visiting another planet, conquering childhood cancer will take the efforts of countless individuals working together, researching, and pushing the boundaries of human knowledge and understanding. Milestones are

accomplished not alone but together. We didn't get to space without the help of countless people working together. The progress that we make every day on our journey makes this mission seem attainable. There was a time where people would look up at the sky and think that it was impossible for any person to step foot somewhere out of this world. But others looked up and knew that with tireless pursuit, anything could be possible.

LOGO DESIGNED BY ANDREA HINKLE

# Bush Family

Sydney Bush is an 11th grade student at Hempfield High School. As a two-year-old, she began getting sick often and experiencing pain in the back of her head and back. However, none of the doctors she saw could figure out the problem. Originally, they thought she had whiplash from the Whip Ride at Dutch Wonderland. Following multiple weeks of doctor visits, she was admitted into Lancaster General Hospital for an MRI.

On August 23rd, 2005 Sydney was diagnosed with a brain tumor and immediately sent to Penn State Childrens Hospital at Hershey. Sydney had an Ependymoma, a rare type of tumor affecting ten percent of patients diagnosed with a pediatric brain tumor. Two days after admitting into the hospital, she was in surgery and the tumor was successfully removed. She then began seven weeks of radiation therapy through a clinical trial. At the time, there were no known chemotherapies effective at treating her type of tumor and after a year and a half of being declared cancer free, Sydney's tumor came back.

She went back into surgery and the tumor was successfully removed. Due to the re-occurrence she was no longer eligible for the same clinical trial she previously participated in. This posed a significant problem because there weren't any other clinical trials or protocols were designed to treat a second tumor. Her Oncologist and Radiation Oncologist decided to proceed with the gamma knife, a high dose of radiation to the location of the tumor.

Treatment of a child two to three years old with radiation to the brain poses many risks due to the long-term effects on a developing brain, creating the difficult question of whether to treat the child given the potentially detrimental risks of the treatment. This is why THON is so important to pediatric cancer research!

One of THON's objectives is to raise funds for childhood cancer research and share this research with children's hospitals throughout the United States. THON aims to do more than help doctors say, "we cured a child", but to help give children a better quality of life after treatment as well.



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*THON means everything to me! It gives me a sense of hope and I'm so happy I'm able to give back through minithon! For minithon this year I'm an overall so I'm able to impact how we raise money a lot more FTK®! I hope to attend Penn State in fall 2021 and study HDFS all while participating in THON, hopefully as a captain! Later in life I would love to become a child life specialist to give back even more,*

”

Sydney Bush said.

Many treatments used today are tough on a growing child's body and while saving a child's life will always take precedence, we also need to discover safer treatments that allow children to live a normal life after diagnosis. Statistics show us that one in five children diagnosed with cancer do not survive, and still, for those who survive, the battle is not over.

A recent study shows that effects of cancer treatment as a child continue to effect the individual well into their 40's. More than 95% of survivors report chronic health problems and 80% develop severe or life-threatening conditions.

These stories often inspire people to help make a difference — how can I help keep this from happening again? We know this is not a battle, but a war. Our family has been involved in this war for 14 years. We have seen battles won and lost, but the one thing we have not seen is an end to this war.



“

**They just make me happy.  
They're awesome.**

”

**Celia Cosentino**

“

We know all about the incredible doctors and nurses, but there are so many other people who helped Celia fight and heal. For almost a year, Celia's paired organization, Ultimate Frisbee, reached out tirelessly with barely a reply from us. Now we are out of the fight and they are still with us and they have become a huge part of our family. Berks Benefiting THON welcomed us in when they didn't have to - we already had a paired org. But they recognize how hard it is to be a sibling of a child with cancer and were a huge support to Adeline while Celia was in the hospital and have continued to include us all in their events.

”

**Sara Cosentino,  
Celia's mom**



# Rachel Brettler

THON has played an integral role in Rachel Brettler's life since high school. A May 2019 graduate, Brettler has continued her involvement with the philanthropic cause, post-graduation, through a communications internship with Four Diamonds.

"I just really fell in love with [Four Diamonds] and I knew that if I had the chance to work for it, I'd love the opportunity," Brettler said.

Through her internship, overlooked by Four Diamonds communications manager Kelly Walker, Brettler has been privy to the innerworkings of THON and said she has enjoyed being a part of THON in yet another role.

Her primary responsibilities are research oriented; learning how to best promote THON's message and how to reach more people. Brettler has also worked on social media projects and helped with family efforts by reaching out to collect family stories.

As a current graduate student studying public health, Brettler said her major has taught her that health encompasses more than vaccinations and being healthy, it's really about "learning how humans can survive and thrive."



"I think that through learning that in class and seeing our families get that emotional support, aside from the health-care, is where that huge intersection with my major is," Brettler said.

Brettler's journey with THON began with her high school's mini-THON and has evolved since coming to Penn State.

"When I came to Penn State, I knew I wanted to get involved with something philanthropic," Brettler said, "so THON was obviously a really great choice for that."

She joined a special interest organization, Springfield, her freshman year after getting to know the personalities of multiple organizations. Brettler said she loved how well everyone in Springfield knew their paired families and was excited to form close relationships with the families as well. "Springfield is just a little weird but kind of quirky and super fun," Brettler said, "but more than that I just saw how loving they were."

Brettler's first THON Weekend experience was with Springfield. She said she will always remember walking onto the floor of the Bryce Jordan Center with Kenzie, one of their THON families, because she had made homemade cards for all of Springfield's dancers and wanted to personally deliver them. Brettler said the happiness on each dancer's face was unmatched and a joy she will always cherish.

There's just this indescribable feeling that everyone is there for THON and it's just such a warm feeling when you walk in," Brettler said.

Her sophomore year Brettler became the Family Relations Chair for Springfield and held captain positions where her primary role was to organize community fundraising. Then, in her junior year, Brettler applied to be a Dancer Relations Committee Member as well.

As a committee member, Brettler said she enjoyed seeing THON in a different light where her role was to help run the event versus the involvement of a special interest organization where she helped with fundraising and spread support for THON.

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*There's just this indescribable feeling that everyone is there for THON and it's just such a warm feeling when you walk in,*

”

*Rachel Brettler.*



During Brettler's senior year she became a Family Relations Captain for the Adopt a Family Program. Through her position she was a liaison to 35 organizations where she would help facilitate strong relationships between org and family. One of Brettler's orgs was the Singing Lions, the premier show choir on campus.

"From the moment I met them I just instantly bonded with them," Brettler said, "we actually became really close friends."

A week after she met the Singing Lions, the org found out that Kira Broadwater, one of their THON children, was being put on end of life care. Brettler said she went to the apartment of the organizations Family Relations chair and sat with members of the org as they cried and shared their favorite memories with Kira.

Brettler said she wanted to make the moment a celebration of Kira's life and helped the org find ways to continue Kira's legacy in THON.

"It was truly the most moving thing I've ever been a part of," Brettler said, "just that conversation in someone's apartment."

However, Brettler said she never forgot her Springfield roots and continued her involvement with the organization all four years.

"I've become extremely close with all four families," Brettler said, "I'll invite them to my wedding someday."

One of her favorite memories with Springfield was taking Kenzie to an



annual anime conference with the help of Penn State's anime club. Brettler said Kenzie loves anime and the conference put a huge smile on Kenzie's face every year.

Another special event for Brettler and Springfield was taking THON child Calliope (Calli) Silbaugh and her family pumpkin picking every year. Brettler said the event was so highly anticipated that one year the event filled up in 42 seconds.

"It's just a wholesome, wonderful day," Brettler said.

This year, she is excited to be attending THON Weekend in a difference capacity with all of the Four Diamonds staff.

"I never saw my life being so entwined with an organization like this," Brettler said, "so overall I'm just extremely grateful for everything THON has given me and I'm so happy that I got to do it. It's truly a privilege to get to participate in an organization like this." ||



## Shiloh Crimmel

## Research

Since 1977, THON had contributed over **\$168 million** to Four Diamonds at Penn State Children’s Hospital, ensuring the highest quality of care for Four Diamonds children without the financial burden. THON’s efforts provide funding for life-saving pediatric cancer research, taking our fight beyond central Pennsylvania and spreading hope around the world.

Through clinical trials and research experiments at Milton S. Hershey Medical Center and Penn State College of Medicine, Penn State Children’s Hospital has made enormous strides in the fight against childhood cancer. For the ninth consecutive year, the Children’s Hospital has been recognized for two specialties, cancer and heart surgery/cardiology and ranks within the top 50 hospitals in the nation for childhood cancer care, according to U.S. News and cWorld Report.

The significance of these efforts is amplified in two-year-old Trinity, a Four Diamonds child diagnosed with cancer in March 2018. Her doctors recommended an experimental clinical trial at Penn State Children’s Hospital after confirming a diagnosis of neuroblastoma in three parts of her body. Trinity will receive treatment once a month for the next couple of years.

Trinity is one of many children to participate in Four Diamonds’ clinical trials at Penn State Children’s Hospital. Four Diamonds’ research has made significant breakthroughs in the treatment of a variety of tumor types, including brain tumors like diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (DIPG). Penn State Children’s Hospital participated in the first study of DIPG to use a molecular based treatment strategy. It is this groundbreaking research that allows children like Trinity to receive life-saving treatment every year.

“When I first met the Crimmel family last year, Shiloh was about to begin the most grueling cycle of her treatment. That day, I left inspired by their family’s strength, resilience, and joy during the most trying of times. Since then, I have observed the Crimmel’s fight as they have overcome multiple milestones, upon which the most moving was experiencing THON 2019 as a dancer through their eyes for the first time. I am grateful for the forever friendships that have been formed between the Crimmel Family and myself through THON. The sky is the limit for Shiloh!”

**Amanda Soukoulis, THON 2020 Family Relations Captain**

### Local Research. Global Impact.™

Four Diamonds scientists and doctors make tremendous strides every year in the fight against childhood cancer. Here is a look at some of their progress this year.



Development of clinical trial protocols to test new drugs for treatment of high-risk leukemia.



Identifying new drug options to treat childhood cancer.



Improvement of brain tumor treatment.



New found understanding of how cell “trash bags” trap and seal waste, which can lead to cancer cell death.



Identification of potential pathways to target when treating leukemia.

# Singing Lions



The Penn State Singing Lions are Penn State's premier and only show choir on campus. With roughly 20 members each semester, they host productions on campus, sing at tailgates and perform for alumni chapters across the east coast during spring break.

Originally part of the school of theater, the Singing Lions are now a club with two THON families, the Barnett's and the Broadwater's.

Alexia Barnett, Lexi, passed away in 2011 from Neuroblastoma at the young age of six. Shortly afterwards, Lexi's grandmother, Wanda, started the Love for Lexi foundation to honor her granddaughter's life. The foundation holds an annual benefit in Redding, Pennsylvania which the Singing Lions attend every year.

Addison Albert, the president and family relations chair for the Singing Lions, said club members continue to

honor Lexi in their own ways as well. Club members will play basketball with Lexi's brothers when they visit the family and every year the club hosts the Love for Lexi Cabaret.

Albert said Wanda and Lexi's brothers come to the event every year to celebrate Lexi's life and raise money in her memory. Half of the proceeds raised during the Cabaret go towards THON and the other half help support the Love for Lexi foundation.

The Singing Lions were paired with their other THON family, the Broadwater's, in 2016 when Kira Broadwater was six. Two years later Kira passed away in December 2018, however, the Singing Lions have continued to support the family and honor Kira's life every chance they get.

Albert said most of their time with Kira was in the hospital, but the group took advantage of every opportunity they had with her. She said they would

bring Kira a new type of makeup every visit in anticipation of her famous make-overs.

"Some of the things our group knows [Kira] by are her glitter make-overs," Albert said. "She only did it to the boys." Albert said Kira put so much make-up on a group member's face during a visit that he had to use a bathroom in Hershey Medical Center to scrub off the make-up before leaving.

Albert also said one of Kira's favorite activities was fishing and although the club never got to go fishing with her, they went on a fishing trip last year in her memory and hope to make it an annual outing.

One of Albert's most impactful memories from her time supporting THON is Kira's funeral.

"It's not a memory that I like to look back on," Albert said, "but every single one of our members were there with

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*No matter what I do at Penn State or in life with my career, I can always go back to that moment and be like 'oh my God, there are so [many difficult times] out there and [the Broadwater's] got through it so I can get through pretty much anything,*

”

*Albert said.*

THON Executive Board and the look on [Kira's mom's] face when she saw us walk in, I can't even describe it to you. It was like she was looking at me like I was a hero, but we did nothing compared to what she did for her daughter as a mom."

She said the moment really spoke to what THON families go through, what Kira went through and how much organizations can really impact their paired families.

"No matter what I do at Penn State or in life with my career, I can always go back to that moment and be like 'oh my God, there are so [many difficult times] out there and [the Broadwater's] got through it so I can get through pretty much anything," Albert said.

Another of Albert's favorite THON memories occurred during her freshman year at Penn State.

"[Our dancers] were two of the best role models to THON," Albert said. "I never saw them frown and no matter what their focus was on our family."

During hour 36, Albert said the Butler boys, Kira's younger brothers, tackled Josh Brown, one of the dancers, and began squirting him with water guns, to which he responded with a huge grin. Albert said what the children didn't see was "the most horrific face" Brown made towards the Singing Lions in the stand before bursting out laughing. All the group members in the stand began laughing with Brown and cheering him on.

"We knew that he had to be in so much pain, but it was nothing compared to this love that he had for the boys, which just absolutely motivated everyone in the stands," Albert said.

The Butler boys have attended THON Weekend every year since Lexi's passing and Albert said she is excited to see them again during THON Weekend this year.

The club will have a spot in the stands with their brother organization, the Thesians this year as they cheer on dancers Jason Beck and Holly Spinner. They will also be performing during THON Weekend.

"I think I'm most excited to see the new people enjoy and kind of understand all of the hard work we've been putting in and [to see] why we do it," Albert said. "It's always excited when someone new comes and learns about this amazing thing that Penn State does that's all student run."



# Club Crossfit



Penn State CrossFit Club aims to enhance the lives of students through a combination of weightlifting and anaerobic movements, focusing on values of discipline, self enhancement and team unity to create a welcoming and supportive environment for members and workout participants.

With nearly 140 members, the club has grown significantly in the past two years and with it, their involvement in THON. The club brings their unique ability to challenge themselves and persevere to their year-long fundraising efforts for THON, tackling larger events every year.

Their biggest fundraiser, Kettlebells for Kids, was held at CrossFit

years ago and have since become best friends with their THON child, Lily Jordan, and her younger brother R.J.

“To us, they’re like a second family here at the club,” Kight said. “It doesn’t feel like they’re our THON family anymore, kind of like a second home for us.

The Jordan’s live in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, about an hour and a half away from State College and the hometown of multiple club members. Coincidentally, Jack Dunphy, a club member and dancer this year, has known the Jordan family since he was little and actually babysat Lily and R.J. when they were younger!

Now, every few weeks during the school year a couple members of the CrossFit Club will drive down to see Lily and her family, have dinner with them, or pack for a weekend getaway and have a huge slumber party.

“We’ve got a good group of 20 of us that love to go over and have sleepovers with [the Jordan’s],” Kight said. “We pretty much just hang out with [Lily] like she’s one of our best friends.”

Kight said he lives about four and a half hours away from State College, so when he’s missing a nice, homecooked meal or spending time with family, he’ll drive over to the Jordan’s house and hang out with them.

One of Kight’s favorite memories with Lily happened last THON Weekend when the club overheard rumors that Mason Ramsey, one of Lily’s favorite singers, would be coming to perform during the weekend.

“We made sure to have Lily front row in case he was to come,” Kight said, “and then he came, and she absolutely freaked out. That was an awesome memory of her and all of us that were able to be there with her.”

The Jordan family has been coming to THON every year for the past couple years, however, Kight was excited to hear the family say they were planning on staying for the Final Four for the first time this year. As a dancer this year,

alongside Dunphy and Hannah Canil, Kight said he is excited to spend time on the floor with the Jordan’s. Kight said about 40 club members will be camped out in the Bryce Jordan Center stands during THON Weekend to cheer on the dancers and spend time with the Jordan family. And when the family needs to take a break from the weekend, the club has that covered too.

“We have a good, core group of people that always keep [the Jordan’s] entertained if they’re not in the BJC,” Kight said. “So, any time they want to step away we have a group that can take them anywhere they want.”



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*To us, they’re like a second family here at the club,” Kight said. “It doesn’t feel like they’re our THON family anymore, kind of like a second home for us.*

”

Nittany this year and nearly tripled the amount of money raised compared to previous years. The event saw over 100 participants, both club members and non-club members, who came to partake in a THON themed workout.

“It gets people that are not involved with CrossFit or involved with our THON family to experience both of those aspects,” Robert Kight, coach and THON chair said.

The club also hosted a hot dog eating contest and pie in the face event at the beginning of the school year. Kight said the afternoon was a successful fundraiser and a good bonding experience for new and returning club members.

Aside from fundraising, the CrossFit Club welcomed their THON family, the Jordan’s, into their lives five



“You never know how strong you are until being strong is the only choice you have.”  
**Nick Baptiste, Four Diamonds child**

**Nick Baptiste**



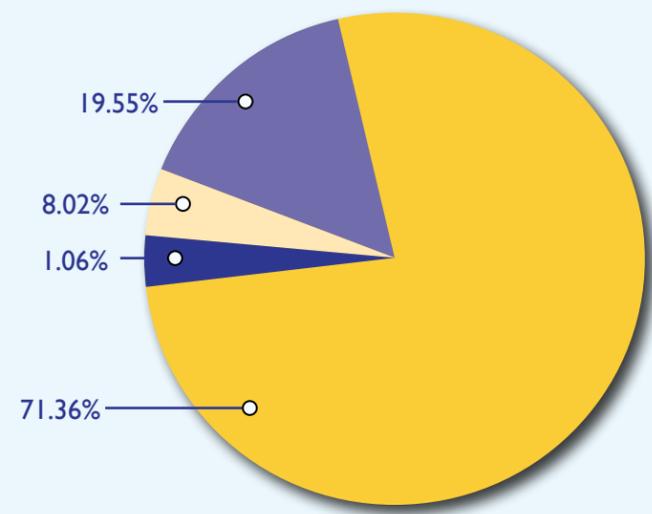
# THON™ 2019

## Summary of Fundraising Activities

**TOTAL: \$11,418,843.60**

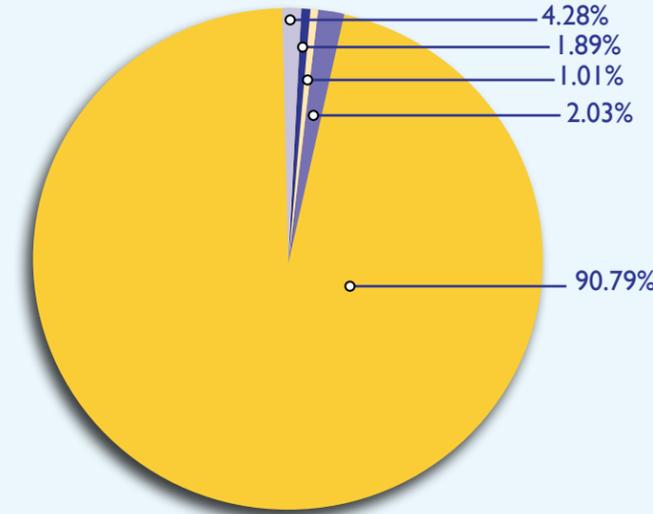
The following information is an official Summary of Fundraising Activities for the THON 2019 fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2018 and ending June 30, 2019.

### Sources of Funds



- Gifts from Individuals**  
Canvassing solicitation, Lion Line, online donations, and personal checks  
**\$8,148,944.30**
- Corporate Donations**  
Gifts from a corporation, foundation or small business; matching gifts  
**\$2,232,786.18**
- Fundraising Events**  
Alternative fundraisers, hospitality promotions, THON 5K, and THON Raffle  
**\$916,101.84**
- THON Store**  
Profits from the sale of official THON merchandise  
**\$121,011.28**

### Uses of Funds



- Four Diamonds**  
Total contributions made towards Four Diamonds  
**\$10,367,366.80**
- Event Management**  
Pre-THON events, THON Weekend  
**\$231,741.62**
- Development**  
Direct mailing campaigns, donor stewardship initiatives, printed THON informational material  
**\$488,525.00**
- Account Balance**  
Miscellaneous holdbacks  
**\$114,973.75**
- Operations & Administration**  
Office equipment, postage, space usage, other general administrative expenses  
**\$216,236.43**

In the 2019 fundraising season, THON raised **\$11,418,843.60**

90.79c of every \$1 donated directly benefits Four Diamonds

In the 2019 fundraising season, THON spent just 9c to raise every dollar

# A Decade of Milestones

Over the past decade, THON volunteers have been working tirelessly to reach a broader audience, minimize inefficiencies and create a larger impact on the nation. With each year we have made at least one significant improvement to the inter-workings of our philanthropy, improvements we are proud to say have resulted in the continuing success of THON each year. From the first release of our fundraising activities to the public in 2009 to the creation of the THON Kickoff Celebration in 2019, each year is met with the celebration of a new milestone.

As we look back over the past 10 years, we are eager to see where the next 10 will take us. Two years ago, we began brainstorming ways to engage alumni and friends of THON supporters in an efficient and impactful way. The idea, originally called third-party fundraisers has now bloomed into THON Nation, a community of supporters working together outside of Penn State to make a difference in the life of a child. It is through the success of these accomplishments that we are filled with gratitude and motivated to continue in our pursuit to find a cure for childhood cancer.

## THON 2009

- ◆ The Summary of Fundraising Activities was publicly released for the first time.

## THON 2012

- ◆ THON partnered with a Public Relations Agency to improve messaging to donors.

## THON 2013

- ◆ THON started using Peer to Peer Fundraising, giving each THON organization a personalized page.
- ◆ THON Athletic events expanded from just THON Football.

## THON 2015

- ◆ Rules and Regulations split into Event Safety and Volunteer safety to ensure our volunteers and events were properly served.

## THON 2016

- ◆ THON began to assist alumni groups through supporting group fundraising.
- ◆ THON began its partnership with the Sustainability Institute.
- ◆ Donor and Alumni Relations became split into Development and Alumni Engagement to ensure our donors and alumni were properly served.

## THON 2017

- ◆ Hope from Coast to Coast started through the Dance Marathon Alumni Interest Group.
- ◆ DNCE performed at THON, creating national buzz.

## THON 2018

- ◆ THON began using DonorDrive, implementing true Peer to Peer fundraising.
- ◆ THON launched its first goal-based campaign, raising \$292,877.11 in one week.
- ◆ The Berkey Creamery created “THON Gold Ribbon Ripple” flavor.
- ◆ A new event was created in the THON Showcase: Hidden Wonders

## THON 2019

- ◆ A new event was created in the THON Kickoff Celebration.
- ◆ THON Nation launched, providing alumni and friends the opportunity to fundraise.
- ◆ THON partnered with Johnson & Johnson in its first formal Giving Tuesday campaign.
- ◆ The White Out at the THON Pep Rally sponsored by the Penn State Alumni Association took place.



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THON™