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Northwestern Now (//)

Dance Marathon supporting, celebrating GiGi's Playhouse

Northwestern gearing up for nonstop dancing March 3 to 5 to benefit two beneficiaries

February 21, 2017 | By [Stephanie Kulke \(/mailto:stephanie.kulke@northwestern.edu\)](mailto:stephanie.kulke@northwestern.edu)

- Primary beneficiary GiGi's Playhouse supports individuals with Down syndrome
- NU students vow to become first "Generation G" (GiGi) college campus in U.S.
- Evanston Community Foundation named second beneficiary for 20th consecutive year

NUDM 2017: Beneficiary Reveal



EVANSTON - Perhaps you've seen the student volunteers, in canary yellow tops, standing on local street corners, waiting for red lights before running -- or sometimes doing funny little dances -- up to the halted cars with their cash cans cheerily extended.

The planning and activities that precede the main event of Northwestern University's 43rd annual Dance Marathon (NUDM), one of the largest entirely student-run philanthropies in the nation, are now in high gear.

The 2017 dance marathon will begin Friday, March 3, when more than 1,000 undergraduate students will gather in a huge outdoor tent to dance for 30 hours straight in an exuberant endurance test to benefit NUDM's beneficiaries, [GiGi's Playhouse \(/https://gigisplayhouse.org/\)](https://gigisplayhouse.org/) and

the [Evanston Community Foundation \(ECF\)](http://evanstonforever.org/) (<http://evanstonforever.org/>).

Through a variety of service projects, volunteers have spent a lot of time this year getting acquainted with NUDM 2017's primary beneficiary, Chicago-based GiGi's Playhouse, the only nationwide network of achievement (learning and healing) centers for children and adults with Down syndrome.

Deeply touched by the experiences, NUDM 2017 Executive Co-Chairs Jennifer Halpern and Ian Pappas have declared Dance Marathon the first "Generation G" (GiGi) college campus.

"We want to promote a culture of acceptance, kindness and generosity of everybody, of every ability, not just this year, but going forward," said Executive Co-Chair Ian Pappas. "More than 400,000 people in the U.S. have Down syndrome, and we are beyond excited that NUDM has the opportunity to help improve the lives of these incredibly inspiring people."

Since 1975, NUDM has raised more than \$18 million for more than 30 different charities. For the past six years, more than \$1 million was raised, with the amount telegraphed in an oversized, eye-popping check that is presented to the beneficiaries at the conclusion of the marathon in the tent, bringing the exhausted dancers alive with wild cheering.



Photo caption: GiGi Gianni, event co-chairs Ian Pappas and Jennifer Halpern with the Northwestern University Dance Marathon 2017 executive committee.

GiGi's Playhouse serves more than 30 different communities throughout the U.S. and Mexico, benefitting more than 25,000 individuals with Down syndrome last year with free, life-changing

therapeutic and educational programs and a strong, personalized support system.

Dance Marathon's fundraising will support three GiGi's initiatives.

"We will fund expansion of its Amina Grace speech and language program and GiGi's fitness programming, and we will help launch the pilot Mobile Playhouse program, which will allow GiGi's to be even more accessible to underserved neighborhoods," said Co-Chair Halpern.

The student volunteers, alongside GiGi's members, also have participated in a number of service events with the Evanston Community Foundation, chosen for the 20th consecutive year as NUDM's secondary beneficiary. Evanston Community Foundation, which awards grants, delivers programs and brings people together around community issues, will receive 10 percent of this year's NUDM net proceeds.

The 43rd annual NUDM begins at 7 p.m. Friday, March 3, and concludes at 1 a.m. Sunday, March 5, at Norris University Center, 1999 Campus Drive, on the University's Evanston campus.

Other fundraising activities and initiatives (listed below) include an online auction and store; 5K and 10K runs around Northwestern's lakefill; a new grant program to support students' fundraising effort; a kids fair; and an alumni reception at the Dittmar Gallery.

New initiatives for 2017

In order to increase financial accessibility and to assist dancers and small teams with their fundraising efforts, NUDM devoted its spring and summer fundraising to a new grant program fund. Thanks to the generosity of corporate sponsors, faculty and departments within the Northwestern community, a grant pool of \$11,000 will support the personal NUDM fundraising efforts of dancers by matching donations of up to \$150 per eligible student.

Saturday, March 4, NUDM will host an alumni reception from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the Dittmar Gallery to commemorate the final Dance Marathon in Northwestern's Norris Center, which has housed the majority of Dance Marathon events during its 43-year history. Norris will close for the construction of a new student center and NUDM 2018 will be moved to a new permanent location inside the Ryan Fieldhouse and Walter Athletics Center.

Alumni unable to attend the March 4 reception can participate in one of the planned Alumnites in [Chicago](https://www.facebook.com/events/1720450081579016/) (<https://www.facebook.com/events/1720450081579016/>), [New York](https://www.facebook.com/events/1437546736258330/) (<https://www.facebook.com/events/1437546736258330/>) and San Francisco.

About NUDM 2017

The 43rd annual NUDM begins at 7 p.m. Friday, March 3, and concludes at 1 a.m. Sunday, March 5, at Norris University Center, 1999 Campus Drive, on the University's Evanston campus, celebrating the conclusion of a yearlong student-run philanthropic effort that typically raises over \$1 million for charity.

An energetic group of approximately 1,000 undergraduate students will gather under a tent on the grounds of Norris University Center to dance nonstop for 30 hours raising funds for [GiGi's Playhouse](https://gigisplayhouse.org/) (<https://gigisplayhouse.org/>) and the [Evanston Community Foundation](#) ([/\[sitetree_link,id=\]](#)), NUDM 2017's primary and secondary beneficiaries, respectively.

Scheduled NUDM highlights include:

Feb. 24

- NUDM's online auction opens and continues through 1 a.m. Sunday, March 5. Items can be viewed in [NUDM's online store \(https://store.nudm.org/\)](https://store.nudm.org/).

Feb. 25

- NUDM volunteers will be collecting donations throughout downtown Evanston.

March 3

- The 43rd annual NUDM kicks off at 7 p.m. with the first of 10 three-hour dance blocks.

March 4

- 5K and 10K runs around Northwestern's scenic lakefill begin at 10 a.m. The pre-registration fee is \$25, though runners are encouraged to raise more for NUDM and its 2017 beneficiaries.
- Northwestern Wildcats Head Football Coach Pat Fitzgerald and the team will visit NUDM at 1:30 p.m.
- NUDM hosts a Kids Fair at Norris Center from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. featuring fun, family-oriented activities. Tickets can be purchased at Norris on the day of the event.
- NUDM 2017 will host the first-ever Dance Marathon alumni reception from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. in the Dittmar Gallery.

March 5

- At midnight NUDM takes the stage for the fundraising reveal. Finance committee will announce the total of funds raised for its beneficiaries through its yearlong, online and on-site tent initiatives.

A live stream of the entire Evanston campus event can be viewed online at [www.nudm.org \(http://www.nudm.org/\)](http://www.nudm.org/).

About GiGi's Playhouse

GiGi's playhouse is the only worldwide network of Down syndrome achievement centers, changing lives through free, results-driven programs for individuals of all ages, their families and communities.

In helping individuals with Down syndrome achieve their best, GiGi's also advances its larger vision of global acceptance for people of all abilities.

About Evanston Community Foundation

The Evanston Community Foundation is focused on helping Evanston thrive now and forever as a vibrant, inclusive and just community.

It connects resources and knowledge with the work of local organizations for the common good by investing in the community through grant making, leadership development and capacity building.

About Northwestern University Dance Marathon

Now in its 43rd year, NUDM is one of the largest entirely student-run philanthropies in the nation. Since 1975, NUDM has raised more than \$18 million for more than 30 different charities.

Last year, NUDM raised over \$1 million for its sixth consecutive year in support of Blessings in a Backpack -- an organization that, through an all-volunteer network, mobilizes communities, individuals and resources to provide food on the weekends for elementary school children across America who might otherwise go hungry -- and the Evanston Community Foundation.

To learn more, visit www.nudm.org (<http://www.nudm.org>).

Pat Vaughan Tremmel also contributed to this story.

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Northwestern University

633 Clark Street
Evanston, IL 60208

Phone number

Evanston
(847) 491-3741

Phone number

Chicago
(312) 503-8649

Email address

webmaster@northwestern.edu ([/mailto:webmaster@northwestern.edu](mailto:webmaster@northwestern.edu))