Dance all night
C of C students raise money for Children's Hospital

BY TENISHA WALDO
The Post and Courier

Graham Walker used to run out of steam a lot faster than most other 4-year-olds.

He was born with a bronchial cyst that caused his heart and lungs to continuously work in overdrive from the added pressure, leaving Graham frequently tired and sluggish.

'Essentially, he was growing a third lung that didn't work,' said his dad, Chip Walker of West Ashley.

In December 2005, Graham underwent 5 1/2 hours of surgery at the Medical University of South Carolina so doctors could drain the cyst and remove it.

On Friday, a fully recovered Graham, who is now 5, boogied with College of Charleston students at the school's inaugural dance marathon to benefit the MUSC Children's Hospital.

Colleges across the nation host similar dance events to raise money for local hospitals affiliated with the Children's Miracle Network. About 170 hospitals nationwide, including four in the state, benefit from Children's Miracle Network fundraisers, which help pay for specialized care and equipment for kids like Graham.

This weekend marked the first time the College of Charleston has participated in the dance marathon, which started Friday night and wrapped up Saturday morning with 15 hours of dancing, free food and activities.

Graham, Amy Patterson Crawford and Brandon Peek, who all have been treated by the MUSC Children's Hospital, stopped by Friday for a couple of hours. Amy is a 6-year-old from James Island who has a hearing impairment and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

Cerebral palsy was diagnosed in Brandon, 12, when he was an infant. In March, the Ridgeville youngster will represent the state at the Children's Miracle Network's annual celebration at Walt Disney World. He'll also travel to Washington, D.C., to meet national leaders.

'Let's get it started,' Brandon shouted to kick off the event and then joined the crowd as College of Charleston student Jessica Williams taught everyone a choreographed dance. The dance helped unite the group and spark enthusiasm during the tough, dry spells.

While Brandon mirrored the arm movements from his wheelchair, Graham danced on stage with Williams and several other students.
Graham’s mom, Elizabeth Walker, beamed at seeing him active again. 'Before his surgery, all he could do was just lay on the couch,' she said.

The more than $20,000 raised by the College of Charleston's dance marathon will help the local hospital continue to provide services tailored to children and their families.

'It's been over a year's work, and for it to finally come together, I'm so happy,' said student organizer Kristina Hahn,

who hopes the event will become the largest annual philanthropic event at the college.

Graham's dad said he was impressed with the turnout of about 100 students.

'It's so special, because maybe one or two have had a sibling that had something wrong with them, but you know all of them didn't,' Chip Walker said.

Along with dancing, students tossed beach balls, decorated Valentine's Day cards for kids in the hospital, and bounced in two inflatable pits.

But in the wee hours of the morning, fatigue set in.

Ememofon 'Amy' Imoh said she knew she was nearing her breaking point around 3 a.m. when her legs and lower back started to ache, and she found herself dancing off beat.

'I got to the point where I felt like I couldn't stay anymore,' Imoh said.

Even Williams, who led a 'morale team' in charge of keeping the group hyped up, said she was barely hanging on during the final hour or so.

'If anybody needs help, ask the morale staff or me, if I haven't passed out in the bathroom,' Williams announced around 9 a.m.

By then, a little more than half the group remained standing.

Determined not to give up, Imoh stuck around. She got her final adrenaline rush just before the marathon ended when the students performed the entire choreographed dance together.

And as the medley rounded out with disco legend Donna Summer singing her hit 'Last Dance,' Imoh threw up her hands and stretched her arms wide. After going nonstop for 15 hours, there were only two things left for her to do: 'Shower and sleep.'

Reach Tenisha Waldo at twaldo@postandcourier.com or 937-5744.

This article was printed via the web on 2/16/2007 11:23:32 AM . This article appeared in The Post and Courier and updated online at Charleston.net on Sunday, February 11, 2007.