

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Students get jiggy to fight AIDS

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Sparkly neon-green and pink Spandex, scrunchie-fastened side ponytails, shiny disco balls, and Nigel Barker. No, this is not a description of the latest America's Next Top Model photo shoot but of something far more significant—the 2011 Columbia University Dance Marathon. On Saturday, Jan. 29, 175 Columbia students sacrificed sleep, studying, and more sleep to dance 18 hours straight inside Lerner to raise money and HIV awareness.

Established in 1988, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation hopes to eradicate pediatric AIDS. Currently, 1,000 children are born with HIV each day, but the foundation—through extensive research, prevention and treatment programs, and advocacy work—is determined to see this change.

Now in its 11th year, the CU Dance Marathon has become a cornerstone of fundraising for the nonprofit foundation. This year, more than \$48,000 was raised through sponsorships and donations—but had any student unknowingly

shimmied into Lerner Party Space this past Saturday, no mention of funds or logistics would have been heard. "We're here to spread goodwill and happiness," dance participant Hannah Roher, BC '13, said.

No doubt much of the apparent cheer resulted from two of the marathon's special guests: noted fashion photographer Nigel Barker and Gossip Girl star Connor Paolo.

"It's important to [help] whenever you can," Barker said. Initially hired as a photographer for the AIDS foundation's two biggest events, Barker became a celebrity supporter once he realized how much he had to learn about the cause. "I was actually very ignorant of the face of AIDS," Barker said. He continued that the face of AIDS "has changed ... and that struck a chord with me."

The two men were there to kick off the marathon, which lasted from 1 p.m. on Saturday to 7 a.m. the next morning, with a few inspiring words. "To instill a desire at a young age with events like this is the least I could do," said Paolo, who joined the organization a few years back, after a close

friend's mother passed away from AIDS.

"Everyone has the right to live," Jake Glaser, son of Elizabeth Glaser, said. The younger Glaser, who contracted HIV in utero but currently enjoys a healthy life free of medication, works closely with the foundation to assure that in the future, "organizations like this won't need to exist."

"We have the meds and technology," Barker said. To bring about a generation free of HIV "is actually doable, and that is an idea we need to get in people's heads."

"We have to reach the finish line," Glaser said. "Which is why I am stoked these kids are down there dancing."

And dance they did. Despite sagging eyes, blistering feet, and wobbling legs, the participants of the 2011 CU Dance Marathon successfully boogied the night away.

Regardless of the students' disheveled appearances emerging from the depths of Lerner on Sunday morning, Mrs. Glaser would likely have thought them gorgeous. She once said, "doing the right thing makes you a beautiful person"



COURTESY OF THE ELIZABETH GLASER PEDIATRIC AIDS FOUNDATION

MORE THAN DANCE | Student participants in this year's CU Dance Marathon managed to stay spirited from 1 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 29 to 7 a.m. on Jan. 30, in the name of charity and AIDS awareness.