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THON off to a strong start Holiday contributions on the decline

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The ongoing fundraising event known as THON, which helps children and families with children who have cancer, has achieved another excellent canning weekend. Their second event, which took place from Dec. 2 until Dec. 4 was well supported by everyone. In that weekend, THON raised \$1,404. This

involved with THON have raised more than \$30 million in the past 30 years. Ever since the Four Diamonds Fund (which assists the Children's Hospital) was created, survival rate of children with cancer has increased about 60 percent.

On Tuesday night, THON held a bowling night to help raise money. The event produced a decent attendance number. "We're hoping to have more bowling nights next semester," said Meredith Straub, director of THON. Thursday night, THON also held a bar night

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Even as the sweet smell of pecan pie and sugar cookies continue to linger in homes filled with families during the holiday season, other aspects that make Christmas the charitable holiday it should be are now absent. That's also the feeling expressed by an elderly Pennsylvania resident who recalls past holidays as being filled with kindness, goodwill and love. Eighty-year old Sylvia Marie Berecek of Ambridge says she remembers days from her childhood as much different in terms of generosity. "The food hasn't changed. Why change the food? The spirit and overall caring has definitely changed," said Berecek. "I'm eighty. I've been around long enough to see the difference."

Born in 1925, Berecek lived on Maplewood Avenue in Ambridge; two blocks from the railroad station. Some of Berecek's fondest memories involve her grandmother's generosity around holidays, such as Christmas, as she made certain that even the poorest, most unfortunate person had a hot meal. Berecek's grandmother, Stella Zivic, would invite homeless who stumbled off railroad cars into her home for a hot meal of bread and soup.

Even though Berecek was "scared of the yucky hobos in dirty clothes," she eventually looked up to her grandmother years later for performing such a noble deed. "People are not kind today like they were in years past. They're actually rude to each other."

Sylvia Berecek's daughter, Donna Houghton, also noticed the difference in holiday spirit. Houghton, 52, recalls Christmas at their home when she was young as much more eventful. "It didn't matter how far the family was spread out. Everybody still made the effort to sit down together at that time of the year," said Houghton. "When I was young, I remember Christmas dinners with over 25 family members."

Last Christmas, Houghton had nine family members make the trip to her home.

The decline in holiday generosity is also reflected in the declining contributions experienced by charitable organizations as the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania.

The Second Harvest Food Bank, in Erie, PA, has evidently felt the strain of decreasing revenue. Revenue fueling the food bank comes from grants, contributions, programs and services, membership fees and dues. In 2002, the food bank had revenue of \$10,482,043.

However, in 2004, the bank's revenue dropped significantly to \$7,960,197, according to Executive Director Karen Seggi.

Seggi, the Executive Director of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania, also has noticed a decline in volunteered hours and donations over the last few years.

Seggi, who has worked at the food bank for the last 16 years, has seen the number of regular volunteers dwindle from roughly 100 to 60 over the last five years. Senior citizens are the ones who are continuing to donate their time, possibly because they are also the individuals who have experienced hunger and have lived at a time when there weren't food banks. "If you've never experienced hunger, you're not going to know the importance of food banks," said Seggi.

According to Seggi, major companies like Nabisco and Kraft have also significantly decreased their donations to the food bank, selling their flawed products to secondary markets instead of donating them for the hungry and homeless, for which they only receive tax cuts. Seggi also believes that Hurricane Katrina may have had an impact on the amount of recent donations, since many families shifted their focus and gave donations to those affected by the disaster.

"It's great that people in our area helped with Katrina, but there are also people right here at home who need food everyday," said Seggi.

Even though she realizes that times have changed and customs are irreversible, memories of days past are still clear to Berecek.

Berecek, in addition to Seggi, would love to see the return of the holiday seasons that were filled with giving, tenderness and extreme generosity. Although it may be difficult to follow the numbers of individuals who invite homeless into their households for warm meals, tracking the revenue of the Second Harvest



Students at University Park celebrate last year's THON, which raised four million dollars.

brought the total money that they raised since Oct. 1 to \$4,598. THON's goal is to raise \$5,000 this semester.

THON is the largest student run philanthropy in the world. Every cent donated goes directly to the children, in an effort to erase cancer in children. They assist the Pennsylvania State Children's Hospital, which is located in Hershey, Pa. Students

for those 21 years of age and older. There was also interest in Juniors Comedy Club sometime in the future. More students have been aiding THON and their goals "We also had a couple informational sessions which more students came to," replied Straub.

THON's next canning weekend will be Jan. 20 through Jan. 22. Everyone is welcome to participate and aid in any way they can. Also in January, there will be the MiniTHON, which will be a smaller version of THON's dance marathon to celebrate everyone's participation and the fundraising for those less fortunate. People can also help in other ways rather than dancing and raising the money.

The deadline for registering is the end of this semester. Email Meredith Straub or Kenneth Middlemiss to reserve your place. "We really want to thank everyone, including the faculty and staff, for being really helpful and caring," stated Straub. "I joined because it's a great cause and something to be a part of."

THON not only helps the families and children suffering, but also the students involved.



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Seniors prepare for Commencement

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As the snow piles up in the Penn State Erie campus and the nervousness of finals week approaches, the 2005 fall graduates are preparing for the end of their college careers. There are expected to be 165 fall graduates this year, although this number changes due to grade fluctuations. The commencement ceremony is planned to take place on Saturday, Dec 17, at noon in the gym of the Junker Center. The graduates will be meeting in the Junker Center at 11:30 a.m. and should notify their guests to arrive on campus around the same time to secure desired seating. The fall graduates are not limited to the number of guests they wish to bring and there will be adequate seating provided for all that choose to attend. As there will be no number to the amount of guests, tickets are not necessary and Behrend students, faculty and community members are encouraged to attend.

Blue and white will be worn with pride as the candidates for graduation that choose to take part in the commencement ceremony will be dressed in the traditional caps and gowns. These gowns were purchased by the graduates during Senior Salute Days in the end of October and beginning of November. The graduates will be assembling around the track of the gym as they perform the honored graduation march. In the Penn State system, final grades for fall semester are not officially calculated until January, so the graduates will not be receiving their diplomas at the ceremony. Once

the grades are finalized, the diplomas will be mailed to the graduates at their home addresses.

This year's Fall Commencement ceremony will feature a number of speakers, some from the graduating class and some selected education enthusiasts. Graduate George Morgan III will be giving the student welcome presentation. The commencement guest speaker will be Dr. Mary Beth Pinto, the associate professor of marketing and the director of the Center for Credit and Consumer Research at Penn State Erie. Leisa Mills will be leading the student song as all join in the singing of the Penn State Alma Mater. Miss Nicole Pacinelli will be delivering the traditional student farewell. The Behrend Ceremony Brass and Percussion Band will be providing the background music and the graduation march theme for the ceremony. Members of Behrend's ROTC color guard are expected to perform as well.

For graduating students who have earned a baccalaureate degree with 60 credits or an associate degree with 30 credits and are in the top 12 percent of their college's program will be recognized during the commencement as distinguished, hardworking and motivated individuals. Immediately following the ceremony, graduates will have the opportunity to have a professional photo-

graph taken with Chancellor Jack Burke. There will be receptions within each of the four schools of Behrend after the ceremony. The Sam and Irene Black School of Business will be holding their reception in McGarvey Commons of the Reed Union Building. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences reception will take place in Bruno's Café, which is located in the Reed Union Building. The School of Science will receive graduates and their guests in the lobby of the Otto Behrend Science Building and the School of Engineering and Engineering Technology reception will be held in Roche Hall in the Engineering Complex.

Parking will be available for graduates and guests in the Junker Center parking lot, but space is very limited. Additional parking will be provided in the parking lots of the Reed Union Building and Erie Hall. As the weather is cold, transportation from the parking lots to the Junker Center will also be provided by means of school buses. If there are guests with disabilities, there will be Behrend police officers around the parking lot complexes to assist any needs of the guests. Lion Ambassadors will be present at the entrance of the Junker Center to help with the needs or concerns of guests as well.



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