

# Videotape focuses on concern for campers

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — They dance for love. One time a year.

Since its inception in 1983, The Dance for Love — a 24-hour dance marathon at St. John Fisher College — has raised approximately \$211,000 for the Teddi Project.

As a result of the Fisher students' annual efforts, Teddi Project founder Gary Mervis said the project — which makes last wishes come true for children dying of cancer — has never had to turn a child away.

Soon the students' efforts will be recognized on local cable channels, as Greater Rochester Cablevision prepares to air Fisher communications professor Lou Buttino's recently completed documentary on the marathon.

Dedicated to Tim Weaver, a Teddi Project recipient who died of cancer in 1990, the videotape "One Time a Year" documents the 1990 marathon. It was intended to show the depth and compassion of Fisher volunteers, according to Buttino, who spent more than a year filming the

project.

"It's a positive statement about young people when so much negative is said about them," he said. "I wanted people to know that not everything is summed up in negativism and despair. There is a lot of good still out there."

Featuring music by the marathon's "Spirit Man," Fisher student Brian Moll, the documentary depicts various intervals in the 24-hour event, beginning with registration and ending with the closing ceremony.

Campus reaction to a preview of the tape was emotional. Seated in Fisher's Basil Auditorium Oct. 18, students who participated in the project anxiously watched the story of their marathon unfold. They laughed, clapped and often cried.

When the presentation ended, students rocked the auditorium by chanting, "Lou, Lou, Lou" to their professor and friend, who was seated in the auditorium's front row.

"The most frustrating thing is that it's only an hour. We had to leave out so many incredible moments," said Buttino's assistant, Mike DiGiorgio (class of 1990), who found it difficult to edit the tape.

After watching the tape, junior Katie Fern, who danced in the 1990 marathon, said it was moving to see that she was in one of the moments captured on tape. Senior Noelle King was so affected by the presentation that she could only say, "It showed everything," before breaking down in tears.

Senior Jay Koenig, a member of the 1990 organizational committee, said the video captured the feelings and emotions that go into the marathon.

"It's a grand celebration of what we are all about," agreed Fisher President William Pickett. "It's more than a dance marathon; it's like the liturgy of the campus."

In large part, Buttino is responsible for the marathon's existence. It began in 1983, shortly after Buttino finished his book *For the Love of Teddi: The Story Behind Camp Good Days and Special Times*, which tells the story of 12-year-old Teddi Mervis and her fight against cancer.

Buttino presented the book as a keepsake for friends of the Mervis family on the one-year anniversary of Teddi's death — February 27, 1983. But even before he finished the book, the author had developed a desire to do more for the cancer-stricken kids. So he discussed with his students the idea of contributing to Camp Good Days and Special Times, a project founded by Mervis two years before Teddi's death.

But what could they do to raise money? A dance marathon, someone finally suggested.

"It wasn't even so much that we knew



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Teddi Project founder Gary Mervis, left, and St. John Fisher professor Lou Buttino share a happy moment after the Oct. 18 premiere of Buttino's documentary, "One Time a Year," which chronicles the 1990 Dance for Love.

Teddi Mervis ... but we all figured if kids have got to suffer than we are going to give something back to these people we don't even know."

That's how former Fisher student Nate Fraser summed up the decision by Fisher's original organizational committee to start The Dance for Love, which is chronicled in Buttino's recently released documentary.

*One time a year, when we all get together ... the song begins.*

The marathon is by far the major event of the year for the Fisher community, according to Pickett, who said about one-quarter of the campus population participates in the annual event.

*One time a year, when we dance for love ...*

Despite a severe snowstorm last February, 450 dancers and volunteers participated in the 1990 marathon. Students brought sneakers, Band-Aids and lots of emotions to Fisher's Kearney Auditorium.

*When our eyes fill with tears, they're tears of joy and tears of sorrow ...*

Some volunteers had lost loved ones to cancer. In the video, one student talks about having lost a college friend to the disease. Another student notes that when he became really tired from dancing, he found renewed energy by dedicating his dances to his late grandfather, whom he

had lost to cancer. "When they are physically exhausted, whatever has been bubbling up inside of them has the chance to come out," Buttino said.

*We're here for the kids, to share in a dream, to give them a wish ...*

Compared to other colleges its size, Buttino said, Fisher raises more money for charity through its dance marathon than any other school in the country raises through a single event.

In 1983, the first marathon raised \$7,500. In 1990, dancers raised \$37,534, and a local radio station added \$10,000 to their total. Through the Teddi Project, more than 180 children have seen wishes come true since 1982.

*The love in their eyes and the joy in their hearts, is a feeling you get but once in your life ...*

Each year since the dance marathon began, Mervis has scheduled a simultaneous event for campers so that the children can meet the Fisher students. Buttino's videotape shows several young campers at the 1990 marathon, and he said meeting the children they are helping inspires the marathon participants to keep on dancing.

*For what's in our hearts, will be with us forever ...*

Although he found parts of the video hard for him to watch, Mervis said the documentary is a tribute to Buttino, the volunteers and St. John Fisher College.

"The hardest part for me was hearing one of the students (in the film) say that Teddi might have been one of her classmates, maybe one of her good friends," said Mervis, noting that Teddi had often spoken of attending Fisher when she went to college.

*The caring for others, it's the greatest love of all ...*

Although a date has not yet been set for cable presentation of the tape, Buttino's 1983 book on Teddi Mervis and Camp Good Days — including endorsements from Candice Bergen and Bill Cosby — is being distributed nationally this year.

Buttino acknowledged that the videotape documentary will be used for fundraising, but he emphasized that he filmed it primarily as a gift to the Fisher students who have made the marathon such a huge success.

"They have been giving so much of themselves for eight years, I thought I'd give something back to them," Buttino said.



File photo  
Showing signs of exhaustion, dancers take advantage of a slow song to relax during the 1989 dance marathon at Fisher.

INTRODUCING

## Mother Earth Sent Me

A NEW CONCEPT IN ENVIRONMENTALLY-SAFE SHOPPING!

All natural toiletries • cruelty free cosmetics • biodegradable cleansers • organic baby food • recycled paper products • recycled greeting cards • organic fertilizer • biodegradable pesticides • non-toxic lacquer & paint • and much, much, more!!

ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE RECYCLED — CRUELTY FREE

1742 Long Pond Road  
(in Longview Plaza between Ridgeway Ave. and Spencerport Rd.)

247-1910

Hours: Mon-Sat 10-9; Sunday 10-5

## HOLY CHILDHOOD ANNUAL CRAFT SALE

**WHEN:**  
Saturday, Nov. 3rd  
9:00 am-4:00 pm  
Sunday, Nov. 4th  
12 noon-4:00 pm

**WHERE:**  
100 Groton Parkway  
Rochester, NY 14623

- HAND CRAFTS
- BAKED GOODS
- WHITE ELEPHANT SALE

A SPECIAL PLACE FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE