A Century of Winter Carnival
1911–2011
The cheerful scene on the Green during a major snowstorm on February 2 was the last thing you might expect to see, given the weather. As country music played, about 30 students loaded buckets with snow to help build a sculpture of a castle. The 100th anniversary design is a tribute to Winter Carnival’s first all-campus sculpture built in 1925.

Volunteers included Jing Wei Pan ’14 of Vancouver, British Columbia, who said, “I was walking by and I just felt like helping.” Brian Freeman ’11 of Windsor, Conn., president of Dartmouth Hillel, brought other members of Hillel out, and said, “It’s such a great Dartmouth tradition to be a part of.” Luke Dornak ’14, a Dartmouth football player from Texas, was encouraged to participate by Head Coach Buddy Teevens ’79, who was also there with about 15 members of the team. Dornak, dressed above the waist only in a T-shirt, said, “This is more fun that I expected it to be. We don’t get snow in Austin.”

Creating the snow sculpture is just one aspect of Carnival that has helped unite students and other members of the Dartmouth community for the past 100 years. Like Homecoming and Green Key weekend, Carnival provides an annual experience that links generations of Dartmouth alumni.

Josiah Stevenson ’57 was a four-year member of the Dartmouth Outing Club, which helped organize Carnival from its beginning through the 1960s. He recalls, “The ski jumping competition was always a major deal, and most of the campus went. The skiers jumped down from about the 14th hole of the golf course in what they called the Vale de Tempe [a nickname drawn from Greek mythology]—it was a very dramatic and exciting spectacle.” Stevenson says his date for Winter Carnival “is still married to me, 53 years later.”

As a member of the Winter Carnival Committee from 1979 to 1982, Mary Thomson Renner ’82 helped create the schedule of weekend events and oversaw the poster contest. “We had a committed, enthusiastic group of students, representing all four classes, who wanted to make the weekend special for everyone in the community,” she says. “Being part of that is one of my fondest Dartmouth memories.”

Whether it’s carving snow, competing in alpine skiing, or donning a costume to participate in the human dogsled race, Carnival continues to bring the student body together to celebrate winter. And as Riley Kane ’12 of Clovis, Calif., who helped devise the plan to revive the 1925 sculpture this year, says, Carnival’s story “has only just begun.”

By Steve Smith
Snow sculptures on the Green are a hallmark of Carnival. Well-known carvings include the Cat in the Hat in 2004 (at right) and a 47-foot tall snowman, which the Guinness Book of World Records tagged as the world’s tallest, in 1987. Sometimes, though, the most memorable pieces of temporary art are those that don’t go as planned. In 1997, for example, a sculpture of a knight melted and was transformed into a knight’s funeral. Amy Henry ’97 served as chair of Winter Carnival Committee that year: “One of my fondest memories was when the snow sculpture collapsed because it was quite warm. The whole group rallied and we made something of it, and I think that added to the spirit of it.”

Carnival sometimes entails extreme weather. Bob Kaiser ’39 remembers being a freshman and collecting the bibs from a cross-country ski race on the golf course. “It was negative 14 degrees. The coldest I’ve ever been. I never had coffee before, but I remember getting a hot coffee at Allen’s Drugstore to warm up,” he said.

The 100th anniversary was recognized recently with the publication of the 2010 book, Winter Carnival: A Century of Dartmouth Posters, which features the original Carnival poster and nearly 100 other images. (The book is available from the University Press of New England at www.dartmouth.edu/~dartlife/goto/183.) Reprints of almost all of the posters can be ordered at the Dartmouth Coop’s website, www.dartmouthimages.com, or by calling (800) 634-2667. The reprint from 1938 (below, center) is the top seller. Original posters can be hot collectors’ items. A poster from 1936 sold for a record $7,500 at an auction in New York City last year.

Art in the elements
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The silver screen
By the 1930s, Winter Carnival was so famous that Hollywood’s United Artists hired none other than F. Scott Fitzgerald, along with Dartmouth’s Budd Schulberg ’36, to write a screenplay about the event. Though Fitzgerald was dismissed from the project (due to excessive drinking) and the 1939 film was a critical flop, the movie’s “admiring depiction of the College can evoke sentimentality in all Dartmouth-affiliated viewers,” says first-year student Katie Kilkenny ’14, an arts writer for The Dartmouth. A continuous loop of Winter Carnival was projected in the Top of the Hop during the 2011 Winter Carnival Ball.

Want a poster?
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‘It’s exhilarating’
Grace Dowd ’11 (right), from Birmingham, Ala., is joined by her father David Dowd ’79 (center) and mother Augusta Dowd, moments after emerging from Occom Pond on February 13, 2011. “It’s exhilarating,” says Dowd, who is a four-year veteran of the Polar Bear Swim. “I tell everyone it’s a necessary Dartmouth tradition.” Thousands of students have jumped in the icy water of Occom Pond since the Polar Bear Swim was introduced in 1990s. In 2010, the event ran two hours over schedule to accommodate the demand when about 500 students—the most ever—took the plunge.

Winning tradition
Carnival has always showcased elite winter sports competition. Contests over the years included ski jumps, some of the first downhill ski races in the nation, cross-country ski races, ice hockey, speed skating, and later basketball and swimming. In 1937, LIFE magazine noted, “Dartmouth’s 27th annual Winter Carnival reestablished for the third year the college’s skiing supremacy over nine other teams, including Yale, Harvard, Williams, Canada’s McGill, and a group representing the skiing cream of several Swiss universities.” In 1955, Sports Illustrated mentioned “Dartmouth’s victorious sweep of the ski meet against the best ski teams in the East.” Today the Dartmouth Ski Team, which won 15 consecutive Eastern Intercollegiate Ski Association Carnivals from 2008 to 2010, continues the winning tradition.

From the ’30s through the ’50s, thousands of visitors came to Hanover for Carnival, some of whom took special Winter Carnival trains from Boston and New York. Above, students and others wait for guests to arrive at the Norwich/Hanover train station, circa 1937. Motorists traveling to Carnival in 1952 caused an eight-mile traffic jam leading to campus.

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PHOTO BY STEVE SMITH
PHOTO BY JOSEPH MEHLING ’69
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“We do tradition like no other place,” said President Jim Yong Kim on a 12-degree evening during Winter Carnival’s opening ceremony on February 10—exactly 100 years after the first Carnival. Together with about 200 students, including many varsity athletes, Kim kicked off a weekend of activities that included a Carnival Ball as well as (clockwise, from top) a Human Dogsled Race, athletic competitions, the Polar Bear Swim, and a pick-up game of broomball on the Green. Pictured below is President Kim with members of the Dartmouth Ski Team, which finished first in Nordic races and second overall in the 2011 Carnival competition. The snow sculpture of the castle was inspired by the first Carnival sculpture created on Occom Pond in 1925.

Carnival’s storied history represents some of the best qualities of our student body—ingenuity, loyalty, and camaraderie. Whether you came here for the cold or in spite of it, seize this opportunity to embrace it like 100 classes of distinguished Dartmouth students have before you.”

— Editors of The Dartmouth’s special Winter Carnival 2011 supplement

Two of the 23 Human Dogsled Race Teams that competed in Carnival 2011: the Purple Zebras, Red Jaguars, and All that Rock and Roll (left) and Team NALA (right)