When their world turned upside down, you gave the Lauro family the ability to focus on Kaia and her treatment.
Warm weather is upon us, spring is giving way to bright sunshine, and Ronald McDonald House Charities of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts (RMHC CTMA) is celebrating how far we have come in 15 months! We are safely welcoming more families to RMH Connecticut and RMH Springfield and caring for families needing a home away from home during their child’s illness. The foundation of our programs is imbedded in the support RMHC CTMA receives from our dedicated volunteers, who were able to return to our Houses in February. In April, we celebrated Volunteer Appreciation Week to honor the selfless work our volunteers do. Each of them has our heartfelt gratitude.

In this issue of From the Heart, we share with you the story of the Lauro Family and their three-year-old daughter Kaia’s battle with cancer. The family was inspired by the Healing Walkway of bricks leading to our Connecticut House. During one of their many stays, the Lauros contributed a brick reminding all our guests to “Never Ever Give Up.”

The Gift That Keeps on Giving tells the story of the estate gift of Estelle and Gerald Landry. Through the facilitation of their nephew, retired McDonald’s Owner Operator Steven Kerley, Estelle and Gerald’s lifelong commitment to giving back has provided the funding to complete the full renovation of RMH Springfield.

Lastly, for the third year, Unitex will be matching donations dollar for dollar up to $10,000, thereby doubling the impact of your gift. We hope you’ll consider participating in this challenge.

With gratitude,

Michelle D’Amore, Executive Director

Additional Ways to Support Families

A catered meal provides a family much more than just food. It gives them time to bond as a family, nourishment and a reminder there are people supporting them every step of the way.

Share your hobbies. Create an activity in a box for families staying at our House. Arts and crafts can help pass the time and brighten someone’s day.

To donate or learn about additional ways to get involved, send us an email via info@rmhc-ctma.org.
Our story began on January 22, 2019 with our 3-year-old baby girl, Kaia, being diagnosed with Stage 4 Neuroblastoma. This diagnosis came after several months of fighting many ailments. To say we were blindsided would be an understatement. My thoughts were:

**What do we do now? Where do we go? How will I continue to work to support my family?**

First, we needed to do some homework to get a plan in place. Neuroblastoma is a relatively rare childhood cancer, accounting for only 6% of childhood cancers with only 800 new cases per year in the United States. The condition forms in certain types of nerve tissue. In Kaia’s case, it formed in her adrenal gland and spread into her bone marrow and various parts of her bones. We were advised to begin chemotherapy immediately. And so our journey began...

We knew Kaia would require at least 6+ rounds of chemotherapy (5 inpatient days each round), major surgery, radiation, then very painful immunotherapy with various scans and checkups in between. I wasn’t sure how I would possibly be able to maintain my job. However, my employers were simply incredible and wanted to help however they could.

We were assigned a social worker to help us navigate these new and uncharted waters. That’s when we were told about the Ronald McDonald House. The first person I spoke with at the House could not have been more helpful, compassionate, and accommodating. I took a tour and was blown away! The House was kept in immaculate condition.

All of Kaia’s surgery and treatments had all gone to plan, however, a slight increase in uptake in one “spot” landed us back in a routine to have inpatient treatments. We returned to the Ronald McDonald House.

**I must have walked to and from the hospital a hundred times. Each time, I would walk over the many inspirational bricks on the Healing Walkway at the House, which inspired me and helped give me the boost I needed.**

We have since donated a brick bearing Kaia’s name and the phrase “Never Ever Give Up” to inspire and comfort those walking to the hospital that they are not, and will never, be alone.

As we hope and pray daily that our daughter’s health continues to improve as planned, it has been a game changer to have the Ronald McDonald House to call home and to continue to be able to run my business, take business calls, and even be provided with a warm meal during the week.

A HUGE thank you to the RMH team for treating my family so kindly, and for providing us with an amazing place to rest and recharge during these very, very challenging days."

Much Love, Brian on behalf of the Lauro Family
The Gift That Keeps On Giving

Estelle and Gerald Landry were individuals with strong ideals who would not compromise when it came to something they believed in. One thing they both strongly agreed on was that you should give back to your community.

The Landry’s nephew, Steven J. Kerley, held a number of positions with McDonald’s throughout his 39 year career. Prior to retiring in 2017, he served as Vice President & General Manager of McDonald’s Greater Philadelphia area. He also served on the Board of Directors for Ronald McDonald House Boston and Ronald McDonald House Philadelphia.

“My aunt and uncle knew how important McDonald’s has been in my life and saw the special involvement that I had with Ronald McDonald Houses throughout my career at McDonald’s Corporation. My aunt was passionate about children and supporting organizations that focused on helping them. What better way to do that than by making a gift through their will that will directly affect the children and families at the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield.

I can feel how special Ronald McDonald House is by not only the families it supports but also by the dedication of those involved, the many volunteers, staff and donors. When an organization brings out true dedication and compassion in those involved, you know it is a very special place.”

I am delighted that their estate helped renovate and reconstruct the entire lower level of the House that includes the children’s playroom, family lounge and TV room, resource center and family meeting room. They would be pleased to see the results of their legacy gift that will support the children and families at the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield for many years to come.

Estelle (nickname Tanti) and Gerald Landry lived in Chicopee, Granby and Belchertown until their passing in August 2019, just two weeks apart. Their estate donated $116,445 to the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield for the renovations and reconstruction of the lower level of the House.

To learn how you can give a legacy gift to Ronald McDonald House Charities of CT & Western MA and impact families for years to come, please contact Dick Popilowski via rpopilowski@rmhc-ctma.org or 203.777.5683
The families at the Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut and Ronald McDonald House of Springfield need your support now more than ever!

As the pandemic continues, we strive to support families who have children with serious illness or injury. The ongoing COVID-19 health crisis adds worry to their already stressful situation and compromised health. We are committed to providing safe and healthy family-centered spaces for families to meet the challenges and uncertainties that each day may bring.

Your support is essential as we continue to provide our families with a sense of relief and normalcy in their already challenging lives.

Did You Know?

- 2 out of 3 families stay with us completely free of charge due to their financial burdens.
- For an additional layer of safety, we have adjusted our meal program by providing families with individually wrapped portions of catered meals. All guest rooms have mini refrigerators stocked with fresh fruits, milk, juice and items to make quick meals in their rooms as well as the use of our House kitchen.
- Your gift, matched by Unitex, will make twice the impact and reach double the families during the Matching Challenge. Every dollar you donate will be matched 100% by Unitex up to $10,000.

We thank Unitex for sponsoring this challenge for the 3rd consecutive year and continuing their dedicated support of RMHC CTMA families.
“I know I would not be in the place I am now if it weren’t for help from others. This is my way of paying it forward. It makes me feel good to help other people, especially those that don’t have a voice to ask for it. An added bonus has been working with all the amazing people that are engaged in the House, both as volunteers and in the community. I am honored to serve.”

“I joined the Board because the Ronald McDonald House was there for friends and family in some of their most difficult times. It’s a great feeling to know that there are things we can all do, big and small, to support a family navigating rough times with their children’s health. By providing families with many things they’ll need to go through their day to day, we are providing comfort and time for them to focus on what’s important. It’s a privilege to have the opportunity to support that work.”

“SHUADPi is privileged to help out and support the House. We work to provide funding, supplies and anything to make the lives of all those staying at the House easier. They are going through the hardest point in their lives, and Theta Rho is determined to take a load off in any way we can. We are here for RMHC.”

1,500 Quilts and Counting!
Featuring Heidi Hurwitz

“Fourteen years ago, my granddaughter, Aliza, called and asked if I would help her make quilts for her Community Charity Project, a requirement for her Bat Mitzvah. She wanted to donate them to the Ronald McDonald House. She hoped to make the children smile and to let the parents know that others cared about their children.

Together, we made over a dozen fleece quilts and were warmly and enthusiastically greeted when we brought them to the House. Soon after that, I decided that I, too, would make quilts and pillowcases and donate them in memory of my younger brother, Dr. Edward Steinlauf, who died of a rare lung cancer.

When I came to the House, and the volunteer saw my brother’s name, she said, ‘I knew him...and he would be so proud of what you are doing,’ and then we both cried. She then said, ‘It would be wonderful, and appreciated, if you continued doing this’... and I am still donating today, in hopes of bringing smiles to the kids and their parents.”
Over the past 30 years, the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield has operated on the simple idea that nothing else should matter when a family is focused on the health of their child—especially not where they will lay their head at night.

Help us celebrate this milestone anniversary by becoming a member of our 30th Anniversary Club.

By giving a recurring gift of $30 or more each month, or a gift of $300 each quarter, you will give families a home away from home throughout our 30th year of keeping families together. This special gift will provide families with peace of mind and comforting accommodations every month of the year.

To become a member of the 30th Anniversary Club, please use the attached envelope or visit us at www.rmhc-ctma.org/donate

Family Fun Facts

Getting to Know Cyon and Cyaire

What is your favorite hobby?
Playing with toys
Riding motorcycles

What do you want to be when you grow up?
An elephant!
A dirt bike rider

What do you like best about staying at Ronald McDonald House?
Going outside
Playing on the playground

An update from the Segala Family

“Colton is a big, healthy boy! He weighs about 15 pounds now and is 4 months old. He loves his rattle, ‘Ezra the Elephant.’ He is teething and learning to suck on his fists. He has come such a long way since October!”
Did you know a gift of just $15 covers the cost of a family’s one night stay? Visit our website to donate today!

rmhc-ctma.org

Round-Up for RMHC
Keep families together.

Ask to round up your McDonald's bill to the nearest dollar and your donated change will help RMHC families.