



Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®  
of Connecticut &  
Western Massachusetts

# From the Heart

Stories of how you keep families together when it matters most

Summer 2022



**Natasha's routine check-up led doctors to believe her baby was in danger. Within days, Ava was born and Natasha needed help to ensure she could stay nearby while Ava was cared for in the NICU. Luckily, help was just across the street...**



# Letter from the Executive Director

"Volunteering is at the very core of being a human. No one has made it through life without someone else's help."

– Heather French Henry

Ronald McDonald House Charities of CT and Western MA had an extraordinary first half of 2022. The Houses embraced greater occupancy, program activities and our guest chef program, similar to pre-pandemic times. We continue to be moved and grateful for the large number of individuals willing to jump in and give their time and talent. This issue of "From the Heart" highlights volunteers Bill, Travis, Melanie and Irene for sharing their special talents and willingness to help fulfill RMH guest needs. Our volunteers "do it all" from sewing to tutoring, playing basketball and providing meals. Each member of the volunteer team brings a unique perspective to their role and what they can offer. They are the foundation of the work we do in supporting our mission of providing a home away from home.



We honor Ronald McDonald House Charities of CT & Western MA volunteers daily for their ongoing support and unwavering dedication. Thank you for answering the call of service. Each day, the RMHC CTMA Team is humbled by your commitment to the mission.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

– Helen Keller

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. French Henry".

## DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

JOIN THE

# 2022 UNITEX MATCHING CHALLENGE

[www.rmhc-ctma.org/donate](http://www.rmhc-ctma.org/donate)



**RMHC**  
of Connecticut &  
Western Massachusetts

# Family Story: Natasha & Ava

I was 23.5 weeks into my first pregnancy when I visited my doctor for a routine check-up. I was feeling a little off and during the exam they told me I'd have to be admitted right away. There was no fluid in with the baby and I could go into labor at any minute. My home is in the Bronx but they sent me here because my baby would have a better chance of survival.



The next day, I went into labor. Ava was 1 pound and 5 ounces at birth. It was really touch and go. She had heart complications and respiratory issues. The doctors told me to expect the worst. They didn't know if she'd survive, but they would do their best. Everything had happened so quickly – from the time I went to my doctor for that check up to the time she was born, it was less than 48 hours. I was in labor for only about a half hour. I gave birth at 6 pm and I didn't get to see her until midnight. It was so scary – the doctors were just taking it hour by hour with her and I had to get into the same mindset.

Two days later, I was discharged and I instantly started worrying about where I was going to go. My daughter couldn't leave with me and I was 2 hours away from home.

I knew I had to stay here but I didn't know if I had to get a hotel, an AirBnB, a rental property... I just knew I had to be near her. Then, the social worker came to me and told me about the Ronald McDonald House. She said I could stay there. My first question was - how much will that cost? She said it didn't have to cost me anything, that they would just help me. I was in awe. Next, I asked where it was and she said it was right across the street. I said, you've got to be kidding me!

I didn't know what to expect when I entered the House. It was scary because I'm away from my home. I'm by myself. But when I arrived, it was everything I needed.

You have your own space, a huge kitchen to use and meals are provided as well! Being directly across the street from the hospital was the number one thing to me. Literally any time that I want to see my daughter, I can just get up and go across the street to the hospital.

It's really like home. They're not just giving you a place to stay, it's the people here too. It becomes a home away from home. I love bingo nights and being around the other families who are going through similar things. It helps give a sense of normalcy without any guilt. You are around other families who are going through difficult times, but you get to laugh and to focus on something else for a little while. I feel happy and I don't feel guilty about being away from my daughter for a little bit. It's a space where you can feel like you have family



Continued on page 3



# Family Story: Natasha & Ava

and connect with other people and not feel like you're going through this alone because that is mentally taxing. It's hard not to break down, but everyone really helped keep me together.

That's probably the most important thing, being around the other families, because you don't feel like you're the only one going through something. It's already stressful but those problems become much bigger when you feel alone. We can talk about how our kids are doing and if they're close to going home. Some families left before us, but I still stay in touch with them. We send pictures of our babies and I can see their child doing well and think that we'll get to that point too. You build lifelong connections and friendships because no one else is going through it with you, no one else can understand. So the other families really helped me.



This place is a godsend. It's been amazing to me. It's taken away all the stress of not knowing where I would sleep or not being close to my baby. I can't even describe the feeling. It's amazing to go through the tough time I was going through and to feel that there's a place and people around who care. The financial burden it removed was incredible. I'm so grateful that I have a place where I can rest that's so close to my daughter. I can watch her grow and get the best care that she needs, and I can take care of myself.

I don't know how I would've gotten through everything that I dealt with had I not stayed at the Ronald McDonald House. I can't even imagine making the commute every day, feeling like I couldn't be with my baby, or the debt I would have been in. I'm not working during this time, so I worried about the basic things like toiletries and meals. Little things that are such a big deal. It's really been amazing. I can't describe it. I am forever grateful to the Ronald McDonald House for what they do for families. It really is amazing, and it gives you a sense of hope just knowing that there are so many other people who care.

I will be advocating for the Ronald McDonald House forever. I always say I'm forever grateful to the Ronald McDonald House. I tell everyone you have to donate to RMH! I tell them to set up a weekly or monthly donation because what they do for families is amazing. It may not be you, but it can be your sister, your niece, uncle, your best friend... a lot of people aren't sure what organization to support. Now I can really speak first hand to this and say their donations helped me! Ronald McDonald House has been a huge blessing because of the burden that it lifted financially, emotionally, and physically. I can't express just how grateful I am.

## Donor Spotlight: Bill Collins



Bill Collins with his wife Julia and children Sophia and William.

Bill Collins is a true partner of his community. As the proprietor of Center Square Grill, co-founder of the Northampton Jazz Festival, and longstanding ambassador of Ronald McDonald House of Springfield, Bill embodies the idea of living, working and bettering your community.

In 2017, his infant son was diagnosed with scoliosis and Bill quickly became a regular in the halls of Shriner's Hospital for Children. During the course of his son's treatment, Bill met several families who had come from far distances and were staying at the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield while their children underwent treatment. It was then that Bill realized how fortunate he was to keep his family together and close to home during an uncertain and stressful time. It motivated him to find ways to help families that had a child undergoing medical treatment far from home.

Bill turned his focus to RMH of Springfield and has become one of the House's most enthusiastic supporters. In his 3 ½ years of involvement, Bill has donated in numerous ways. His support includes donating a pallet of Lego toys to give to families, the catering services of his restaurant, Center Square Grill, during the inaugural Trees of Hope Springfield, and serving as the Master of Ceremonies for the House's 28th Annual Gala. His biggest impact comes from his restaurant partnership of our Dine & Donate events which began at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and have successfully raised funds for families for the past 3 years.

"I love working with the team at the House. I think of myself as being at their disposal for whatever they need. Without the House, these families couldn't get the treatment they need for their children. It's important to me to know that we're helping families like my own, but who aren't as fortunate to be near their homes."

# CENTER SQUARE GRILL



# Volunteers in Action



Irene has been a volunteer in our Springfield House since January 2017. As a retired nurse, families appreciate her calm and kind presence and helpful responses to their questions. Irene is always willing to lend a hand to create a welcoming House for our RMH families. From cutting daffodils to brighten the reception area, restocking the kitchen coffee and snacks, to placing homemade quilts and welcome bags in rooms for our guest families, Irene can always be counted on.

When we say our volunteers do it all, we aren't kidding! One of our guests, Anais, came to our front desk with a question – she needed help with her algebra homework. Our volunteer Melanie jumped to action and helped Anais study. A few days later, Anais told us that she aced her test!



Local Springfield basketball star, Travis Best, is an enthusiastic supporter of our House. When he heard that one of our guests, Arturo, was a basketball fan hoping to play a game, Travis knew what to do. He helped us to arrange a pick-up game with a local high school team so that Arturo could get out and play! Arturo had a blast and made memories to last a lifetime.

# Annual Events

## THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING OUR RECENT EVENTS!

### **36th Annual Golf Tournament Supporting RMH of Connecticut**

Race Brook Country Club  
Orange, CT  
Held on May 23rd

### **11th Annual Dancing Under the Stars Supporting RMH of Connecticut**

Anthony's Ocean View  
New Haven, CT  
Held on June 10th

## UPCOMING EVENTS GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

### **31st Annual Gala Supporting RMH of Springfield**

The Starting Gate at GreatHorse  
Hampden, MA  
July 8th

### **22nd Annual Golf Tournament Supporting RMH of Springfield**

Twin Hills Country Club  
Longmeadow, MA  
August 1st

### **5th Annual Red Shoe Virtual 5K Run/Walk Supporting RMH of Springfield**

September 4th - 10th  
Wherever you are!

### **7th Annual Sporting Clays Supporting RMH of Connecticut**

Fairfield County Fish & Game  
Protective Association  
Monroe, CT  
September 30th

### **2nd Annual Trees of Hope Supporting RMH of Springfield**

Gary Rome Hyundai  
Holyoke, MA  
November 5th - 18th

### **33rd Annual Trees of Hope Supporting RMH of Connecticut**

Maritime Center  
New Haven, CT  
December 3rd - 11th







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**Did you know ?**

You can support RMHC families  
right from your smartphone!



**Please ask to  
Round-Up  
for RMHC**

**When you visit  
your local McDonald's,  
ask to "Round-Up" your total  
to the nearest dollar to help our families**

