A PLACE TO CALL HOME FOR THE GALVIS FAMILY

“We loved every single moment that we spent at this House and learned to call this place a home. RMH staff will always be considered a part of our family.”

-Laura and Daniel

When Laura and Daniel were told their baby would likely be born prematurely and require time in a NICU, they knew one of their first steps should be to find a nearby Ronald McDonald House. They had been in a similar situation a few years earlier when their first child was born.

“With Jeremy, our first son, we were lucky enough to stay at a Ronald McDonald House in Pensacola, FL. He was also in the NICU, for about 20 days, and during that time we were offered the opportunity to stay at the House. That’s when we came to know RMH and the beautiful work you do.”

Continue reading inside.
2020 was quite a journey. The global pandemic created both opportunities and challenges for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Connecticut and Western Massachusetts. While it was a difficult year, we have much to be grateful for.

We continue to be truly amazed and humbled by the outpouring of support and generosity of our communities. In this edition, you will read of the creative ways volunteers continued their involvement to provide comfort and care to families in need. Families like Laura and Daniel, who adapted to a new way of life when their third son was born prematurely.

Our gratitude extends to The Suites, a local hotel, that graciously took families in when we needed to temporarily suspend House operations. Lastly, we would like to thank our healthcare partners; Baystate Health, Shriner’s Hospital for Children and Yale New Haven Health for ensuring RMHC CTMA staff have every tool available to help keep our families safe and healthy during their stay.

On January 13, 2021, we kicked off the year with the 30th anniversary celebration of our Ronald McDonald House of Springfield, a home-away-from-home to more than 12,500 families and counting. Understanding the restrictions on gatherings, the RMH team was determined to celebrate safely with those responsible for the last 30 years – our volunteers, McDonald’s Owner Operators and House staff. No spoilers in this column, read on to see how we marked the occasion and future opportunities to celebrate with us.

Our hearts are full as the year is off to a promising start. We will continue to navigate the challenges that face us in the months ahead and be ready for the opportunities to support our mission of helping sick children and their families. Thank you for your continued support. As long as families need us, we need you.

With gratitude,

Michelle D’Amore, Executive Director

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Looking Ahead with Renewed Hope

More than $99,000 in COVID-19 Relief Funding received from numerous grants and individuals, as well as over $6,100 worth of in-kind donations of PPE and cleaning supplies, to offset the cost of new safety procedures.

Families saved approximately $655,552.00 in out-of-pocket lodging and meal expenses by staying at one of our Houses.
Laura and Daniel were relieved to find out that there was a Ronald McDonald House directly across the street from the hospital where their baby, Nathan, would be born. After his arrival, they quickly arranged with their hospital social worker to stay at the House. Unlike their last RMH stay, their family was dealing with more than the stress of a premature baby. They had two other young children to care for at home and a global pandemic, which placed lots of restrictions on their hospital stay. Laura shared some of her reflections on how COVID changed their stay, “Yes, things would have been different [without COVID]. Starting with the fact that we would have all been together when Nathan was born. My family, my mother-in-law, my children would have been able to be there with us when he was first born. And then after, when he was in the NICU, it would have been helpful to take turns, with my husband and mother-in-law rotating bedside. So all of that was different due to COVID.”

Strict COVID-19 rules at the hospital and the House, meant that Daniel, who needed to continue to go to work, was unable to stay. However, Laura was able to bring her two children, Jeremy and Matthew to stay with her, as well as her mother-in-law, Maria, to help. “The House helped a lot. The fact that we could stay here with the children and their grandmother. Before it was just grandma and the kids at my house and me here, and that was stressful for everyone. So first and foremost, we could be together at the House,” shared Laura. “Also, the staff helped so much. Having someone to talk to, to distract yourself a bit and talk about other things, it really helped ease the stress of what you’re living through. At times, you could almost forget the difficult situation you are in, because we were made to feel at home here.”

Ask young Jeremy and Matthew what they liked best about their stay and they would undoubtedly say the playground! The boys spent countless hours playing outside, swinging and sliding, and driving around their toy cars. Laura laughed as she shared that they also really loved the never-ending supply of macaroni and cheese and dinosaur shaped chicken nuggets from the family kitchen. And as hard as it was for Laura to pick her favorite part of the House, it was equally as hard to choose a favorite memory. “Really all my memories are special. I start to think about the House and my heart beats faster. You would not imagine all the fun moments that happen as a result of staying here. We are new to Connecticut, so it was great to make so many new friends. We learned about many local places. We learned about benefits we might qualify for, for food and health needs.”

Lastly, Laura wanted to share this, “We are just really thankful. We feel very blessed by the people we were surrounded by at the House. We want to thank every person who had something to do with our time here and keeping us so happy. And thank you for everything you do for every family who comes to stay here.”
On January 13, 1991 the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield opened its doors as a place of comfort and care for families with seriously ill or injured children needing medical services from local hospitals and healthcare facilities. Since that day, the House has been home to more than 12,500 families, always operating 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.

“We are thrilled to celebrate the milestone anniversary of the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield,” stated Michelle D’Amore, Executive Director of Ronald McDonald House Charities of CT and Western MA. “Thank you to all of the volunteers, community partners, and donors for making the past 30 years possible. We look forward to many more years of providing support to children and families with your help.”

The House is fortunate to have the continued involvement of several founding members who saw the need for a local Ronald McDonald House over 30 years ago and continue to believe in and support the mission to this day. On January 13, 2021 a small group of House staff, Board members, founding members, and representatives from McDonald’s gathered for an outdoor ceremony to recognize the momentous occasion. We were thrilled to include our dedicated volunteers in the day’s celebration as well, by holding a drive-through cupcake parade in front of the House.

We express our sincere thanks to everyone who joined us in celebrating the House in January and encourage you to get involved throughout 2021, as we continue the celebration in other exciting ways!
A Founder’s Fond Memories: Craig Carr

How did the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield come to be?
I was a member of the new class of Junior League of Springfield. The class was divided into groups to research a different need in the city of Springfield. I had recently seen an article about the Ronald McDonald House program and we all thought that researching the need for a House in our area would be interesting and fun. We quickly found that both Shriners and Baystate Hospitals had independently inquired about a House. Along with hospital interest, there needed to be a parent group or other organization that would be willing to organize and spearhead the project. Our provisional group broached the idea of taking on the project with the Junior League and they voted to do so. Once gaining approval, we began organizing a board of various individuals representing the community and our different needs.

What accomplishment are you most proud of over the years?
A major accomplishment of the House is that we have housed families for such long periods of time. Many of our families stay with us for over 6 months, which means that those families have a lot of downtime. The staff and volunteers have always created activities to keep them entertained and happy.

Do you have a fun memory to share?
A funny early memory was that when the House was completed and almost ready for occupancy, it was suggested that the board have a sleep over in the House to basically test it out. It turned out to be a beneficial idea as the next morning, no one, and I mean no one, could figure out how to turn on the shower! Once you learned the trick, it was fine. It helped us see the House through the eyes of our incoming families and be prepared to show them the necessities of the House upon check in.

What has kept you involved for 30+ years?
Staying involved has been easy because of all the great board members, staff and volunteers who have made it fun to contribute their time. Also, it is fun to create something from scratch.

Ways to Join the Celebration

Join the 30th Anniversary Club! Pledge to give $30 each month to support the future of RMH of Springfield! Mail in the attached donation form or go online to www.rmhc-ctma.org to sign up.

Join us at our Annual Springfield House Events as we continue to celebrate 30 years supporting children and families!
- 4th Annual Red Shoe 5k Run/Walk
- 30th Anniversary Gala
- 20th Anniversary Golf Tournament
- NEW– Trees of Hope

Visit our website www.rmhc-ctma.org for more information.
As the pandemic continues, volunteers constantly rise to the occasion, getting creative and finding new ways to give their time, talents and compassion to families at our Houses.

Take for example, members of our Houses’ Junior Boards, who would normally host in-house activities to entertain families, and are now assembling and sending craft boxes with instructions and all the supplies for a fun do-it-yourself craft time!

Or Mary and Bruce, who were there for us when a snow storm brought more snow than expected. They didn’t hesitate to lend a hand, shoveling the walkways so families could safely visit their children across the street at the hospital.

Or the numerous volunteers sending our Houses catered meals, fresh groceries, wishlist items, and cleaning supplies.

“I’ve supported the Ronald McDonald House in various ways since the doors opened in the 80’s. Currently I’m unable to volunteer in person but I will be back! In the meantime, I’m contributing to the house by providing lunch for the guests on two Saturdays per month.” - Volunteer Pam

Here is just a glimpse at the amazing support we received in 2020, to help our Houses face the challenges of the pandemic:

- 90 catered meals delivered
- Over 40 Facebook fundraisers raised over $8,400
- 132 individuals or groups dropped off donations of pop tabs
- Over $6,100 worth of in-kind donations of PPE and cleaning supplies
- Peer-to-peer fundraisers and events, including a motorcycle run, virtual Zumba class, 5k run, and greeting cards sale, raised nearly $45,000

To learn about current volunteer opportunities and ways to get involved, send us an email at info@rmhc-ctma.org.
Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut’s Virtual Trees of Hope was held online from December 5th-13th, 2020. Guests were able to view over 120 displays and purchased raffle tickets online, from the comfort and safety of their own homes. Thanks to our supporters, the virtual event raised over $89,000 and proved to be a great success for Ronald McDonald House families during these unprecedented times.

Did you know?

Longtime supporter and McDonald’s Owner Operator, John McKnight, was honored last fall for 50 years of service to the community of North Haven, CT, including years of generous support and involvement with our Ronald McDonald House of Connecticut. Congratulations John!

In 2021, McDonald’s is doubling their donation amount for each Happy Meal purchased in order to provide even greater support to RMHC families.

Next time you visit McDonald’s, grab a Happy Meal and be sure to check out the RMHC fun facts and activities on the box!
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

4th Annual Red Shoe 5K Run/Walk

Virtual - Join from wherever you are!
Participate by Saturday, April 24, 2021

Get moving, promote health & wellness, and participate virtually in our 5K from the safety and convenience of wherever you are!

Complete your run or walk by April 24, submit your time and be sure to send us your photos.

Prizes will go to:
- Top fundraising team
- The most spirited individual
- Fastest female and male participant

Grab your gear and get out there to show your support for the families and children of the Ronald McDonald House of Springfield! Registration is now open! #RedShoeRunGoesVirtual