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Like the First Buds of Spring...

**Hope Often Blooms When We’re Not Looking**

At this time last year, words like pandemic, social distancing and safer at home were emerging in the headlines. While we knew what the words meant, it was difficult – and often a little scary – to try and understand how those words would impact us, not only in our personal lives but in the lives of the families, volunteers and staff at Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin.

Serious illnesses and injuries affecting children do not take a break and neither have we. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and dedication of our staff and volunteers, our Ronald McDonald House® has remained open throughout the pandemic. In 2020, 984 families called our House home for a total of 12,301 nights. Long term family stays (60+ nights) totaled a staggering 4,561 nights. Although our Volunteer and Family Meal Programs were suspended for a good portion of the year, volunteers devoted 11,167 hours of service and provided 395 complimentary meals for our families (primarily catered deliveries).

Last spring, our postcard mailers reminded us that “Like the first buds of spring, hope often blooms when we’re not looking.” 2021 brings a new year filled with new hope for our House. We continue to provide compassionate care to an average of 25-30 families a night. We’ve gotten creative with our resources and are proud to offer virtual programs that include theatrical performances, storytelling, pet therapy and more.

We look forward to expanding our RMHC community this year, both with the Family Room program at Rogers Behavioral Health in Oconomowoc, Wis. and a new expansion that will help us better serve families right here in Milwaukee. There will continue to be challenges, but with hope, love and your support, there’s nothing we can’t accomplish, especially when it comes to keeping families together and promoting the health and well-being of children.

With hope and optimism,

Ann Petrie
President/CEO

Todd Jones
Chairman of the Board
A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

Moms Rachel, Jessica and Alex sharing hope in the Secret Garden.

When you look at the smiling faces of Jessica, Rachel and Alex, you see three strong women with an unbreakable bond. They affectionately refer to themselves as the “TA Moms” – a name as unique as the commonality surrounding their unlikely friendship. The TA stands for tracheal agenesis, an extremely rare birth defect in which the windpipe is completely absent or significantly underdeveloped. Each TA Mom has a child – Thomas (5 years), Tennison (19 months) and Ava (6 months) – who was born without an airway.

While all three pregnancies were high risk, doctors had not detected the condition before birth in any of the children. Each mom recalled feeling very alone after their child was born. Although Jessica, Rachel and Alex have close families and strong support systems, each felt something was missing.

Jessica tried to reach out to other families with tracheal issues, but had trouble connecting because Thomas’ case was so unique. When Tennison was born, Rachel’s medical team at Children’s Wisconsin suggested that she connect with Jessica for support. Rachel was hesitant at first – she was scared and then heartbroken to hear that there was another family experiencing the same diagnosis all alone.

*COVID-19 precautions were taken for this photoshoot

Listen to the full interview to hear directly from these moms about their connection, favorite House memories and more!
Rachel remembers that their first phone call, “wasn’t about the depravity of it all, it was about hope.” Jessica and Rachel met face-to-face for the first time while they were both staying at our Ronald McDonald House® and it felt like they already knew each other.

When Ava was born, Alex was also connected with Rachel and Jessica through the medical team at Children’s Wisconsin and, once more, the bond was instant. Rachel felt blessed to be in the position to support someone else, but was scared that there was another family dealing with this diagnosis. Alex and Rachel met in-person at the House, while Alex and Jessica shared experiences via phone, text and Facetime. The first time all three moms were together in person was in early March to shoot the photography that accompanies this column.

For Alex, the “TA Moms” sisterhood is what keeps her sane during this difficult journey. Seeing Thomas and Tennison brings her comfort and a glimpse into what Ava’s future could be like. She is filled with the hope that one day Ava, Tennison and Thomas will meet in person.

Jessica, Rachel and Alex agree that the connections made at RMHC – the sense of community and support – are what keep them going. Perhaps Rachel said it best: “I feel a connection with each of them and it was immediate. We have something to offer each other that is greater than I could have ever expected. I’ve been offered so much hope, love and strength I can’t imagine what it would look like if I didn’t have these ladies in my life.”

We hear from countless families about the lifelong friendships made with other families during their time at the House. The compassionate community that wraps its arms around our families provides support, comfort and hope to help make the hardest days a little easier.

The Seegers family stay has totaled 287 nights so far.

The Richards family has stayed a collective 389 nights at RMHC Eastern WI to date.

The Greens checked in on October 6, 2020 and are still staying with us (168 nights and counting).
Pulling Together for RMHC® Eastern Wisconsin

At RMHC Eastern Wisconsin, small aluminum pop tabs make a big difference. Since 2000, our Pop Tab Program has raised nearly $400,000 to help us keep families together. From Harley riders to Daisy Troop members, families, friends and communities really pull together to support our mission!

4th Annual Highline Lane “Tab Toss” and Donation Collection

Office Assistant volunteer, Erin Strankowski, is no stranger to the power of pop tabs. Every Labor Day weekend, Erin and her family head to Stephenson in Northern Wisconsin for their annual trap shoot competition. Highline Lane, the “dirt road” that Erin and family stay on every summer, soon became home to the Highline Lane Tab Toss Day. Fast forward four years and Highline Lane families now bring friends and relatives for an entire day of weighing tabs, collecting donations and gathering in support of RMHC Eastern Wisconsin.

“When we started [Highline Lane Tab Toss Day] four years ago, we never imagined it would grow to what it has become,” explains Erin. “It was simply a friendly competition between families on either side of Highline Lane, competing for bragging rights for collecting the most pop tabs. We were so proud of the 14 pounds we collected in that first year.”

The enthusiasm for tab tossing grew, which led the group to collect 80 pounds in their second year and 155 pounds the year after that. Their 2020 goal was 200 pounds. They knocked that goal out of the park, finishing the weekend with 293 pounds of tabs!

Donations to the House also included over $250 in gift cards and individually wrapped snacks, along with requested cleaning supplies and Lunch-2-Go containers.

Erin is humbled that her friends on Highline Lane have embraced her love of RMHC Eastern Wisconsin and is so proud of what they all continue to accomplish each year!

Happy Campers Tab Collection Weekend

It all started around a campfire in 2000. A group of friends, led by duo Phil and Marie, started a friendly competition to see who could collect the most pop tabs. At the end of the competition, all of the money received from recycling the tabs would be donated to a worthy cause. Twenty years later, the group, now known as the Happy Campers, has collected almost 15,000 gallons of tabs and donated over $23,000 to RMHC Eastern Wisconsin.

The Campers gather at Sheboygan Broughton Marsh Park every spring and fall for a weekend of camping and tab tossing. Phil and Marie’s dedication to the event has resulted in families from all over the state and across generations to come together in support of RMHC®.

In the first year, the three competing teams – X-Team, Schads and Melgers – yielded enough milk gallons filled with tabs to just fill one picnic table. The Schad Team earned the title of “Ultimate Tab Collectors” with a total of 32 gallons.

The Happy Campers marked their 20th anniversary with a collection of 956 gallons of pop tabs – their third highest total to date! The X-Team collected a total of 456 gallons, earning them bragging rights until this spring’s gathering.

In addition to the money received from recycling the tabs, an anonymous donor gave $500, and another $325 was raised through can koozie sales and general donations. Our House was so grateful to receive total donations of just under $2,000 in 2020!

The Happy Campers foster a great sense of community and truly live up to their mission of making a difference, one tab at a time. Feel free to like them on Facebook at @happytabbycampers.
Local Chefs Cook Up a Recipe for Success

Each February, some of the finest Milwaukee-area professional chefs volunteer their time and talents to create a remarkable fine dining experience benefitting RMHC® Eastern Wisconsin. Known as Chefs’ Dinner, this special evening is dedicated to celebrating our mission and raising funds and friends.

As we started planning for our 35th Annual Chefs’ Dinner, it was apparent that COVID would force us to think outside of the box this year. After nearly a year of pivoting to virtual events (not to mention the dreaded “Zoom fatigue”), we brainstormed about how we could provide a memorable experience for our guests and, more importantly, wondered if our chefs would be in a position to help us?

The team quickly developed the concept for Chefs’ Dinner To-Go, presented by Sauve Terre Farms. Culinary expert and longtime House friend, Joe Muench, who has participated in Chefs’ Dinner even before he took over organizing it nearly 20 years ago, recruited long-time supporters Adam Pawlak and Justin Aprahamian to help plan and prepare a delectable four-course meal for 200 diners to warm, plate and enjoy at home. Our friends at Badger Liquor donated the perfect wine pairings. The dedicated volunteers that make up our Chefs’ Dinner Committee helped us put together a fresh, unique silent auction and staff prepared a variety of content for attendees to enjoy during their meal or whenever convenient for them.

The evening was a success! We are grateful for our generous supporters who helped us raise just over $70,000 for our mission.

Joe Muench
Chef/Owner, Black Shoe Hospitality: Maxie’s, Blue’s Egg, Story Hill BKC

“I was introduced to Chefs’ Dinner when I worked for the chef who started the event and was handed the baton in 2002/2003. I like what RMHC is about – families staying together during hard times with children’s health issues. It is really important to support a cause like that.”

Justin Aprahamian
Chef/Owner, Sanford Restaurant

“[The RMHC® Chefs’ Dinner] has a special place in my heart that goes way back to when I was in high school. Carrying on the event with Joe at the helm has been very special.”

Adam Pawlak
Executive Chef/Owner, Egg & Flour Pasta Bar

“[RMHC] is a great cause and they help families that have children going through tough times. [Chefs’ Dinner] is a great way for me to use my skills and passion to help out.”
In 2018, Bridget and her mother, Kathy, traveled from Franklin, Massachusetts to Wisconsin so Bridget could attend the residential program for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) at Rogers Behavioral Health. In November of that year, when Bridget turned 18, she transitioned to the Partial Hospitalization Care Program (PHP) in Brown Deer, which meant a long term stay in Wisconsin. This was when the two were first connected with the Ronald McDonald House®.

“The Ronald McDonald House was our home for the next six months and I’m really not sure what we would have done without it,” says Bridget.

During their stay, the two found solace in the Great Room, a large communal space where guest families often gather in between appointments. Kathy was grateful for a place to connect with other families.

“When your child is struggling, it’s a difficult time for everybody. For me, I was away from home, we were across the country. I was scared, overwhelmed, and incredibly lonely. The Ronald McDonald House, the Great Room in particular, provided a place for me to connect with other families, other parents who were going through their own challenges, but were of tremendous support. We laughed, we cried. We ate a lot of snacks. We made connections that were just invaluable.”

The therapeutic programming at RMHC brought Bridget comfort and opportunities to meet other guests of all ages. She enjoyed painting during Art Therapy and learned how to play the ukulele in Music Therapy. Bridget recalls that Pet Therapy was everyone’s favorite and shared, “that’s where I met Alfie, who is admittedly my favorite. All of [the programming] kept me from feeling so homesick and kept me connected with people, some of whom I might not have ever connected with.”
The Ronald McDonald Family Room will serve as a welcoming, home-like space for families, just steps away from their children receiving treatment at Rogers Behavioral Health. The Family Room provides family members and other caregivers a place where they can relax, prepare a meal, have a snack, or rest while preparing for the emotional and mental demands of having a child in the hospital.

For over a decade, RMHC has been serving families whose child is being treated at Rogers. Establishing a Family Room Program within the Ladish Co. Foundation Center will allow both families residing at RMHC and other Rogers’ families to benefit from this supportive, comforting environment that is just footsteps away from where their child is receiving treatment. We will have one of the first Family Room Programs in the entire RMHC system to exclusively support families with behavioral health needs.

“This is an incredible step in Rogers’ history of providing highly effective mental health and addiction treatment for those who are struggling, the people that love them, and the communities we live in,” says Pat Hammer, Rogers President and CEO. “We will be forever grateful to the Ladish Co. Foundation and Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin for their support and partnership in ensuring these resources are available when needed most.”

“Having family members nearby while supporting a patient receiving treatment has proven to have a positive impact on their recovery,” says Ann Petrie, President and CEO of RMHC® Eastern Wisconsin. “We are proud to partner with Rogers to deliver family-centered, compassionate care to those facing mental health challenges.”

RMHC Eastern WI will continue to welcome and provide overnight accommodations for Rogers families who are eligible to stay at the Ronald McDonald House in Milwaukee.
Volunteering is a work of heart!

Our volunteers have been making a difference in the lives of our families for 37 years and counting!
"Being able to help out at the House has allowed me to grow as an adult and as a person. It is always nice to see happy children at RMHC - it really makes me feel good that I had an impact, even if a small one, on someone else's life."

- John G.

"I cannot wait to get back to volunteering at RMHC®! The opportunity to work together with amazing people to help make a difference in the life of others is the best feeling ever. My teammates are like a second family to me and I am so excited to get back to working together.

By far, volunteering at RMHC is one of the most rewarding opportunities I've been given in life and I'm proud to be part of such an amazing cause."

- Amy

"It brings joy to my heart knowing that I'm part of the wonderful mission of RMHC - being a "home away from home" for families facing a difficult time in their life."

- Joan

"I think I speak for all volunteers when I say I miss my home away from home! Looking forward to the day we can all get back to our regular schedules to serve the mission and safely reconnect with guests, fellow volunteers and staff!"

- Chris

"My favorite part of volunteering at the Ronald McDonald House is experiencing the camaraderie and teamwork that is shared between myself and the other regular volunteers on my shift. The House has given so much to me, and has taught me that working together is a crucial part of life and it is the best way to help those in need."

- John S.

"Personally, I can't wait to come back to the House! I miss the ladies that I volunteer with. The time really flies by when you're working with people who have become your friends. I can't wait to be back in the House volunteering with friends and helping out!"

- TJ

"It has been a long year since being notified in March of 2020 that our Ronald McDonald House® was going to start serving guests without the normal team of volunteers to support the effort. As a Van Driver, I have been away from the House for almost a full year already. I miss seeing the strength of the House guests as they get through each day with smiles on their faces. I believe that the volunteers receive more from the guests than we can possibly give in return. I look forward to the evenings where I am driving guests around and doing what I can to help make their day a little less stressful."

- John G.
Love is the Key Ingredient

It is often said the kitchen is the heart of the home. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this statement rang true throughout the nine kitchens in our Ronald McDonald House® and especially in the Family Dinner Kitchen. Enticing aromas filled the air as volunteer meal groups prepared dinners, brunches and Lunch-2-Go options for guest families, and offered a special place to reconnect around the table after a long day of appointments.

When the pandemic hit, we wondered how we could continue to provide meals to our families. It turns out, we had nothing to worry about. So many generous friends stepped in with food to stock our pantries and to graciously sponsor catered meals so that our guest families did not have to add meals to their list of worries.

We are proud that despite the rollercoaster ride of 2020, our Family Meal Program never stopped providing sustenance to help fuel families through their long days. When we look at everything that’s kept this program running, it’s obvious that no matter the recipe, the key ingredient is love.

When gal pal meal group volunteers, Cookers with Hart, learned that the Family Meal Program was suspended, they rolled up their sleeves on our behalf. Instead of preparing their monthly meals (they’re famous for their Chicken Booyah), they went to work raising funds to sponsor catered meals. Four delicious catered dinners were provided for our families in 2020, courtesy of Cookers with Hart!

One of the meals sponsored by Cookers with Hart came to us from Ally’s Bistro. Ally’s has proudly served the local community since 2011. We are excited to foster our relationship with them as they open a new location, right down the street from us on Innovation Drive.

In April 2020, Brett Lindsey, CEO of Midwest-based fiber network company, Everstream, announced that the firm would provide local Ronald McDonald House Charities® Chapters with a daily meal in seven of its markets for 30 days! Our chapter was a grateful recipient of this gift.

We proudly partnered with area restaurants to support our local community. At the end of the 30 days, a total of 875 meals were donated, valued at over $9,000. We are so thankful to Everstream and the participating restaurants for their support.
Little Ways to Make a Big Impact

You can have a positive impact on the families who call our House home today as well as in the future by making a current gift now and a commitment to a future gift. Recurring gifts allow us to provide our families with a community of compassionate care and support now and in years to come.

Current Impact:
• Cash, check or appreciated securities
• Qualified charitable distributions
• Donor advised fund gifts

Future Impact:
• Estate gifts
• Life insurance policies

Here is the information you’ll need to request a contribution be mailed to Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin:

Ronald McDonald House Charities
Eastern Wisconsin
8948 Watertown Plank Rd.
Milwaukee, WI 53226
Federal Tax ID 39-1433107

Did you know...

...the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) created several opportunities for you to reduce your tax liability while also helping support families at RMHC® Eastern Wisconsin?

Tax legislation, passed in late March, expands 2020 charitable giving incentives for taxpayers in the following ways:

• You can now claim up to $300 in charitable contribution deductions in addition to the standard deduction.
• If you itemize, the legislation removes the income limitation for a current charitable contribution deduction.
• Although the legislation suspends required minimum distributions from your IRA for 2020, you are still able to make a charitable gift directly from your IRA to a charity without any tax impact.

Please consult your tax advisor as we would love to talk with you about giving opportunities.

Call Bridget Kesner, Director of Philanthropy, at 414-935-6511. She would welcome your call!

Cost for a One-Night Family Stay
$140

Nights Stayed in 2020
12,301

Average Nights Stayed
12.5

Average Daily Utility Cost
$335

Stocks Pantries for One Month
$250

Provides Weekend Brunches and Lunch-2-Go
$300

Provides Family Dinner for the Entire House
$500
Growing with Love

Did you know that RMHC® Eastern Wisconsin turned away 277 families in 2019 because all of our guest rooms were full? Or that the average long term family stay in 2020 was 109 nights?

Not only are more families seeking our services, but their needs are also evolving. It is time for our House to grow with the ever-changing needs of our guest families.

Although 2021 marks the 7th anniversary of our last expansion, we need to grow again. It’s time for us to imagine new spaces and to reimagine our existing spaces so that we can serve our families better in the future.

We are excited to break ground this spring on a new long term family wing, featuring 14 additional guest rooms, a beautiful new kitchen, indoor and outdoor play spaces and so much more.

During our 12-month construction period, we will continue to provide a community of support, comfort and compassionate care to families calling our House home.

Do you imagine being a part of this project? Contact Bridget Kesner at bkesner@rmhc-easternwi.org or 414.935.6511.

Special thanks to the Imagine Campaign Steering Committee!

This special group of volunteers and Board members will help us make this dream a reality.

Josh Carlson
BMO Harris Bank
Market President

Maureen Manning
Community Volunteer

Dan Geigler
Morgan Stanley
First Vice President

Lindsey Pearson
Badger Liquor
Chief Operating Officer

Andrea Jonas
Moroch Partners
Partner

Jeffrey Steren
Steren Management Co., Inc.
Owner/Operator McDonald's
Walk Down Watertown

The House that Love Built has evolved since opening its doors in 1984!
4 Ways to Donate

♥ Go online - www.RMHC-EasternWI.org
♥ Text HomeWord to 41444
♥ Call Bridget - she'd love to talk to you! (414) 935-6511
♥ Clip it - send the form below to Jennifer Krueger at our address, listed above!

Enclosed is my gift $500 ☐ $250 ☐ $100 ☐ Other: _____

Name: ____________________________ Address: ____________________________ Telephone: ____________________________ Email: ____________________________

By giving your email address you will receive occasional e-newsletters. We do not sell information.

Credit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ AmEx ☐ MC ☐ Discover Security Code: ___________
CC Number: ____________________________ Exp. Date: ____________________________
CC Zipcode: ____________________________ ☐ I’d like to cover the credit card processing fee.
☐ Please send receipt via email.

Please make checks payable to RMHC Eastern Wisconsin.
Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. HWA21

It costs just over $140 per night for a family to stay at RMHC Eastern WI, yet we suggest our families make a donation of just $20 a night.

No family is ever turned away for their inability to pay. Your ongoing support is a major reason why.

Thank you for your generosity!

Ann Petrie, President/CEO
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