It’s An Honor to Serve

As I reflect on my term as Board Chair, it has certainly been interesting! If you would have told me at the beginning of my term that face masks would become the hottest fashion accessory or that words like social distancing and pandemic – or “turn on your camera” and “you’re on mute” would become part of everyday vocabulary, I wouldn’t have believed you. We have certainly experienced our share of challenges and opportunities associated with COVID-19 and other issues facing our country.

While much of the world was placed on hold due to COVID-19, serious illnesses affecting children and their families never took a break. Amid business closures and “safer at home” orders, social distancing and the development of a vaccine, I am proud that our Ronald McDonald House® remained open throughout COVID-19, continuing to provide comfort and compassionate care to families who needed us most during such a difficult time.

I have been inspired by the dedicated House staff for everything they have done – and continue to do – to keep our doors open for the families that need us most. I am also grateful for the volunteers and generous supporters, without whom it would be impossible for us to keep families together and promote the health and well-being of children. It has been an honor to serve this organization that touches the lives of children and families, providing comfort, support and a lifetime of memories for so many, myself included.

If you joined us for the RMHC® Color the Night Gala last month, it was a memorable night to be together, in person, celebrating our mission. We are grateful for your support!

Todd Jones
Chairman of the Board

Board Director, friend of the House and friend to many of us, Mark Natzke, passed away unexpectedly last month. Mark’s passion and support of our Ronald McDonald House was steadfast and made a difference in the lives of many. We will miss Mark for the wonderful person he was, for his Board service and for his love for our mission.
Whether Rogers is a patient’s first stop or their final stop on their journey, the journey is long and exhausting. Families are tired and at the Family Room they can finally take a breath, knowing their loved one is in good hands just a short distance away. This is what our campus had been lacking all these years and we are so very thankful to have partnered with Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin to give these families the space they need.

Kristin Wendlandt | Director of Operations | Rogers Behavioral Health
When Brianna and Andy took their kids sledding in early March, they did not anticipate a fun family outing turning into a nightmare. Their seven-year-old daughter, Ellie, was riding downhill with a friend when their sled hit an icy patch and sent them full-speed into a tree. Ellie was unconscious, missing teeth and had an extensive leg injury. She was taken by Flight For Life to Children’s Wisconsin (CW). Ellie was in critical condition and while doctors did everything they could, they could not save her leg. Through 19 surgeries, the lower half of Ellie’s right leg was amputated. Ellie was in the hospital for over two months while she learned how to navigate losing her limb and learning to walk again.

Eventually, Ellie was able to get daytime passes to come visit her family at RMHC® and it was a welcome break from her daily treatment at CW. She especially looked forward playing at the Lego Station, visiting with staff and, of course, visits to the Magic Room.

For Ellie’s parents, our House has been so much more than a place to stay. Brianna shared, “Ronald McDonald House® is a place that welcomes you as their own. It’s a comfort to know we have a family there. It's nice to feel like we belong somewhere.”

Ellie continues to adapt to life with her amputation. Some of her favorite pastimes include arts and crafts, reading, telling jokes and playing soccer. She is proud to say that she can play just as well as any of the other kids and even scored the first goal at a recent game.

Unfortunately, some of the kids at school have not been kind to Ellie. Rather than let it get her down, she took part in a school presentation to educate students about bullying and why it’s not okay. If there is one thing Ellie and her mom wish everyone knew, it is that Ellie is still the same girl. She may look a little different than most of us, but we’re all the same inside.
Ellie has exuded positivity and bravery through a life changing traumatic event, which many people would struggle to navigate. “Most kids would have lashed out, cried, hated life. Not Ellie – she doesn’t ever feel sad about it,” said Brianna.

Your Lasting Legacy

With a little planned giving and a big heart, you can leave a lasting legacy on the families who call our House home. When you leave a gift to RMHC® Eastern WI in your will, or designate a percentage of your retirement plan assets, you:

- allow us to provide our families with a community of compassionate care and support now and in years to come.
- enjoy the advantages of planned giving. Ask your tax advisor about certain tax advantages for you and your loved ones.

Check out Ellie’s school presentation, covered by her local news station!

How do you want to be remembered?

Call Bridget Kesner, Director of Philanthropy, at 414-935-6511, to find out how easy it is to make a planned gift to our Ronald McDonald House. Thank you!
During a perfectly normal walk to kindergarten, our super energetic 5-year-old said he was “too tired to walk…” That little utterance was like the falling over of the first domino in what seemed a never ending fall apart. A visit to the pediatrician became immediate admission into the hospital and the pronouncement that he had leukemia. A few days later his diagnosis changed to a disease not nearly so scary sounding, Aplastic Anemia (AA). The doctors in California seemed to know little about this rare disease and the dominos kept falling.

Just as it seemed we would all collapse, we found a doctor that specialized in our 1 in 3 million disease at Children’s Wisconsin. But we lived in California, how could we possibly pick up and move our family of five to Wisconsin? How would we leave our family and support system, our dogs and everything familiar? And where would we live?

But as our son got sicker and sicker, how could we not leave. Two months after that first domino fell, we found ourselves walking into the Ronald McDonald House in Milwaukee and instantly knew we would be ok. The fears of “How could we leave?” and “Where would we live?” melted away as we were led to our cozy “short term room.” Such irony, given that we went on to have one of the longest consecutive family stays!

The House easily and naturally became our new home as we shuttled back and forth, with our son staying both inpatient and outpatient, as the weeks became months. The staff became our new support system and the other families in the House easily became our Wisconsin family. The rhythm of life was made so much easier by the amazing support – it allowed us to be singularly focused on our kids, the sick one and the not sick ones, who all needed comforting in equal portions. Between the Art Room, the Secret Garden, Pet Therapy with McNugget and the Magic Room, we were able to capture moments of joy and laughter, reserving our tears and stress for quiet times shared with other parents who truly understood – they too had dominos falling.

After close to a year with chemo and a bone marrow transplant behind us, the dominos stopped falling. Not everyone we met got to go home as we did. We think about our friend Sam, and other kids we lost, every day. But we are ever in gratitude for the House, the Wisconsin family and yes, the joy we found, as the dominos met their end and we travelled west, leaving a bit of our hearts in Milwaukee.

It has been eleven years since my first bone marrow transplant and nearly eight years since my second bone marrow transplant. I now have a career as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). I felt compelled to pursue a career in the medical field for multiple reasons, including my three older sisters and my mom holding various positions in healthcare.

Not only did my family have an impact on my decision, but experiencing how important healthcare workers were during my transplants gave me a new appreciation for the field. The level of care I received at Children’s Wisconsin was truly unmatched. Experiencing that high standard of care made me realize how important it is to be compassionate and loving in healthcare. I try to carry that with me into my career every day.

When I reflect on the care I received at the hospital, it is natural that I fondly recall my time at the Ronald McDonald House. It was a godsend for my family and me. We made lifelong friends with the other families sharing medical hardships, and with the selfless volunteers and staff that created my home away from home during not just one, but two of the most difficult chapters in my life. They fostered such a healing place for me when I needed it most. I carry so much gratitude with me for every single person that played a part in my recovery.

I am so thankful to now be able to show others the same compassion and comfort in my career. It has also been such a great experience working with my three sisters and mom at the same facility and supporting each other along the way. The Ronald McDonald House will always have a special place in our hearts!
My name is Carson Molle. I am an 18 year old suicide survivor from the small town of Seymour, Wisconsin. When I was just 14 years old, I attempted to take my own life. Obviously this action has impacted the past 4 years of my life and it has led me down many paths – many positive paths that otherwise wouldn’t have been open to me. One of which is my journey with the Ronald McDonald House.

Suicide attempts are caused by mental illness that can come in many different forms. It also comes with a lot of misunderstandings, so there are a few things I’d like people to know. One – it’s not a selfish choice. I didn’t make my attempt because I wanted to punish anyone or because I was weak and didn’t think about others. In fact, it was the hardest and scariest thing I’ve ever done. All I could think of was how it would affect my friends and family and I didn’t do it because of them, I did it because I felt I wasn’t good enough for them. Another myth – it’s something you can control. There’s a reason it’s called mental ILLNESS, just like any physical ailment is called an illness, and that’s because it’s something that happens to you, not something you choose. No one chooses to wake up every day with depression or anxiety, it’s just a part of our brain that we can’t control. It should be recognized and dealt with in the same way that any physical illness would be.

The Ronald McDonald House impacted my life in a less direct manner. My first experience wasn’t from MY stay, it was from my family’s. When I was in the hospital for an extended period of time, it would be a little chaotic for my parents to sleep on the tiny couch in the tiny hospital room already crowded with medical supplies, equipment, nurses and doctors.

Ronald McDonald House came to the rescue. It meant so much to me to be able to have my family close by in a comfortable environment where they could easily rest, reset and be accepted. It allowed them to be in a place where they could better take care of and communicate with me.

I did get to stay a few times in the House and those experiences were just as positive. My first impression was “Wow, this is like a fancy hotel!” and I knew as soon as I entered that I would be comfortable and accepted in this building. My favorite memory of the House is the retro Donkey Kong arcade game in the Game Room. I would spend hours playing it, getting better and better at each attempt, the night before surgeries. Another favorite is playing basketball! Whatever the reason for my stay, I could enjoy the outdoors and lose my thoughts through the net. Often if I was having surgery the next day I couldn’t eat after midnight, so we would head to the kitchen late at night to make some mac ’n cheese or find a delicious meal that a generous donor had left for us.

In short, my life, and my family’s life, would be very different without the Ronald McDonald House. I would’ve experienced extreme stress the night before surgeries without the pastimes and my entire family wouldn’t have been as rested or as healed to help me through my recovery. I have done some fundraising for the House through some of the events I have spoken at as a mental health advocate. I feel honored to be able to give back a little bit of what has been given to me. So thank you, Ronald McDonald House, you helped make a terrible experience for my family and I that much easier.
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: ________________________________
Name on Card: ________________________________ 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.

Use the camera on your phone to scan the QR code and make your donation online!

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!