



# Home Word



Keeping Families Close®

Spring 2025



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# Serving More Families, Better

Last summer, our Board of Directors and staff began the important work of identifying the Strategic Priorities that will guide our decisions over the next three years. With guidance from our Global Charity, we have aligned our Mission, Vision and Impact Strategy Framework with chapters worldwide. The key areas of focus that will influence our 2025-2027 Strategic Priorities are:

- Serve More Families, Better
- Drive Engagement
- Enhance Collaboration
- Prioritize People

*Scan to learn more!*



As the world continues to evolve, so do the needs of families calling our House "home" while navigating the medical needs of their sick or injured children. Through feedback collection, data analysis and other efforts, we will continue to evaluate programming and seek to better understand unmet family needs so that we can enrich the family experience for our guests.

This is a significant and impactful time as our staff and volunteers come together to support more families and provide them with the best service possible. We are excited to share updates as we continue advancing our mission.



*Laurie Bertrand*

Laurie Bertrand  
President/CEO

*Lindsey Pearson*

Lindsey Pearson  
Board Chair

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# Home is Where the Heart Is



When she was just six years old, Leland Barnett was diagnosed with Aplastic Anemia, a rare and life-threatening bone marrow failure disease that prevents the body from producing platelets, white blood cells and red blood cells. She underwent immunosuppressive therapy, spending a lot of time in the hospital – and in isolation – until she responded to the treatment.

Once the immunosuppressive drug therapy started to work, Leland was able to live a somewhat normal life, enjoying school, sports, clubs and other activities. Although dealing with a serious health condition became a way of life for the Barnetts, her treatment came with some not-so-fun side effects, so regular visits to her hematologist and other doctors were also the norm. She started college at the University of Alabama, living the dorm life, joining a sorority and attending University of Alabama football games.



*Leland and Lisa Barnett have called our House "home" for 279 nights to-date.*

Leland's goal was to graduate from college before having a bone marrow transplant, but despite all efforts, continued drops in her blood counts made it evident she could not wait. The Barnett's knew they would travel from their home in Alabama to seek the expertise of Dr. Margolis and the care team at Children's Wisconsin.

After staying five weeks inpatient at CW to receive chemotherapy and the lifesaving bone marrow cells, Leland joined her mom at our Ronald McDonald House; the close proximity makes it easier for her many follow-up visits to the transplant clinic.

"It is hard to navigate your child's serious health situation while you are so far away from home and your support system," shared Leland's mom, Lisa. "We look forward to the day when we are back in 'Sweet home Alabama' but until then, home is where the heart is and for now it is the blessing of the Ronald McDonald House."

The Barnetts expected to be home in time for Thanksgiving last fall, but Leland had a setback that has kept them here a little longer than expected. She is doing well and started online classes through the University of Alabama as she continues to pursue her degree in Management with a focus on Human Resources. Leland plans to return to UA in person next fall for her senior year and graduate on time next spring.



# We Are Family

Baby Shane was admitted to Children's Wisconsin on May, 11, 2024, due to complications from feeding. While his mom, Alicia, was producing enough milk, doctors thought the milk was lacking the fat needed for Shane to gain weight. She expected a short stay – just long enough to work with a lactation consultant and gain the information needed to help Shane thrive.

Days turned to weeks. The care team tried different types of formula and even a Nasogastric (NG) Tube – a thin, flexible feeding tube inserted through the nose, down the throat and into the stomach – to try and get Shane the nutrients he needed, but his condition remained the same.

The doctors have continued to change formulas, run various tests: ultrasounds, endoscopies, other procedures, and there is still not a direct answer as to why Shane needs extra help to gain weight. He is currently receiving the nutrients he needs to thrive via a central venous catheter that delivers a Total Parenteral Nutrition solution of carbohydrates and lipids. Shane recently weighed in at exactly 16 pounds. He's still on the smaller side – about 16 pounds shy of where he should be for his age.



*"I'm just extremely grateful and always will be for everything that the House has done for us."*





Throughout this journey, Alicia has been appreciative of the resources our Ronald McDonald House has been able to provide for her and her family – meals, toiletries, laundry facilities and more. Most importantly, though, the House makes it possible for Alicia to keep Shane's brothers and sisters with her while also focusing on Shane's health.

Alicia's brother helps when he can, but her sister lives in southern Illinois and her mom lives in Georgia. Alicia is not alone though – the staff and volunteers at our Ronald McDonald House have become like family for her, lending an ear and showing support during such uncertain times.

"I'm just extremely grateful and always will be for everything that the House has done for us. I know Shane will continue to need medical care, so knowing that RMHC will show support of our family no matter what is something that I will always be thankful for."



***Our House has been a home away from home for Alicia and her children for 288 consecutive nights so far.***



# A Lot of Heart (and a Little Elbow Grease)



It makes a real difference when group volunteers donate their time and talents to make our Ronald McDonald House a better place for the families we serve. Our friends at M3 Insurance strive to give back in ways that have real value and we are fortunate that they support our mission.

Each month, a group of M3 volunteers roll up their sleeves and get to work. From landscaping and deep cleaning to inventorying supplies and assembling mailings, the dedicated teams from M3 never say no. They also made a huge impact during our 70 room refresh project, moving box springs, unboxing and installing new mini fridges and televisions, and more.

The generosity doesn't stop there. M3 Insurance sponsors our fundraising events, volunteers at our annual Golfing For Our Families and even collects pop tabs. In fact, they collected more than 150 pounds of pop tabs in 2023 alone!

Our House is clean and welcoming thanks to the hearts and hands of friends like M3 Insurance.

## Let's Ride!



Our team of 400+ volunteers is a diverse group of people, ranging in age, professional backgrounds and personal experiences. Despite their differences, they

all extend the same amount of care, compassion and kindness to our guests, doing whatever is needed to ensure families can focus on what matters most – the health and well-being of their children.

Van Driver, Mike Krzewinski, is no exception. In addition to an illustrious, 20+ year career in law enforcement, he earned his master's degree and a PhD, and was a professor at Milwaukee Area Technical College, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Concordia University, The Chicago School of Psychology and Marquette University.

Despite retirement, Mike realized his work in public service wasn't finished.

"While I was running the food pantry at St. Josephat's Church, my wife, Cheryl, was involved with special events at the Ronald McDonald House, especially the Christmas Fantasy House. She told me about the need for van drivers and said I should give it a try." The rest is history! Mike has driven our seven-passenger van on regular runs to and from Children's Wisconsin, the grocery store and on other errands as needed since 2015. "I fell in love with the place, the guests and the staff. It's an enjoyable volunteer experience."

Mike's dedication to our mission is rooted in his own family's experience.

His son was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma at 10 years old and he remembers what it was like to frequent the hospital. With this innate understanding, he offers a smile and a listening ear for anyone who wants to talk through their struggles. "It's a rewarding feeling, meeting nice people, interacting with and listening to them. That's what life should be about!"

We are incredibly grateful to Mike and the rest of our volunteer team for fostering a community of support for the families we serve.

*Scan to join us on a van ride with Mike!*





# A Day in the Life of a Family Room Volunteer



Nestled on the Oconomowoc campus of Rogers Behavioral Health is the tranquil, lodge-like setting of the Ladish Co. Foundation Center. Right off the main lobby of the building is the Ronald McDonald Family Room®, and as I head through the doors, I am relaxed and ready to start my volunteer shift.

As I sign in and don my red apron and nametag, I catch up with the staff person on duty and find out what tasks are on docket. I never know what each shift has in store for me, but the variety is part of the fun! Some days I'm making a sample craft for Valentine's Day, others I'm baking a batch of chocolate chip cookies for guests to enjoy. It's even better when a patient or family member wants to help!

I work to ensure the Family Room maintains its warm and inviting atmosphere by routinely sanitizing high-touch areas and countertops, running the dishwasher and laundry, and just generally keeping things neat and tidy. While they may not be the most glamorous tasks, I am happy to do them because I see firsthand the impact that the Family Room and our available resources have on families with children receiving treatment at Rogers.

In between volunteer assignments, I check guests in and give tours to those new to visiting. When I have some downtime, I love to talk with the Family Room staff, interact with a family or enjoy a chapter in a good book. The most rewarding part of this "job" is when a family thanks me for helping make this space feel comfortable in a time when they need it the most.

When the end of my shift comes, I take off my nametag and apron, sign out and say my goodbyes until next time.



## There are many ways to support families in need!

Here are a few ideas to consider:



Adopt a Guest Room



Make a Meal



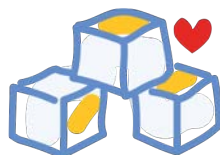
Volunteer



Collect Pop Tabs



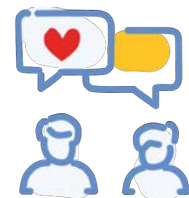
Host an Event



Host a Wish List Drive



Round-Up for RMHC  
at McDonald's®



Remember RMHC  
in Estate Plans

Visit [rmhc-easternwi.org](http://rmhc-easternwi.org) and click "How to Help" to learn more! If you would like to discuss how your gift can make the biggest impact, please contact Bridget Kesner, Director of Development, at 414.935.6511.



Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Eastern Wisconsin, Inc.  
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**Your support lets  
kids be kids!**

It costs just over \$110 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.

Scan the QR code to give online.  
Thank you!

