



Home Word



Keeping Families Close®

Fall 2025



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Purpose, Strength & Comfort



As I reflect on my term as Board Chair, to say the past two years have been a blessing would be an understatement. They also brought unexpected challenges, including a personal battle with breast cancer. I am incredibly grateful to share that my cancer was caught early. While the journey was difficult, I made it through and am now cancer-free.

People often ask, *how did you manage it all* – a cancer diagnosis, intensive treatment, working full-time and serving as Board Chair of RMHC?

The truth is, my role as Board Chair was a gift, giving me purpose and strength, and the House provided comfort and refuge during dark and trying times. I was surrounded by incredible House staff, Board members and volunteers who showed me endless compassion and love, much like I experienced when my family stayed nearly 14 years ago. It gave me a sense of control when so much in my life felt beyond my control. And in that space, I found the strength to support others, just as the House had supported me.

I want to extend my deepest thanks to the dedicated House staff and my fellow Board members for allowing me to work alongside them, offering support and for being willing to step up whenever needed.

And to the countless volunteers, donors and supporters – thank you for your unwavering generosity and dedication. Because of you, the House is in a stronger place today than it was when I began this role two years ago. We truly could not fulfill our mission or serve families without your commitment. I am so grateful for all that you do.

As I prepare to pass on my Board Chair responsibilities in January, 2026, I do so with confidence that the House is well-positioned to continue its vital work. I look forward to staying involved and supporting the mission as a Board member – and I look forward to seeing you at the House!

Lindsey Pearson
Board Chair

*"The House is a place where compassion surrounds you,
and hope carries you through."*

Moments, Hope & Care

As autumn arrives, I'm filled with gratitude for all we've accomplished together in 2025. Our House has never been busier—demand has at times outpaced the rooms we have, a powerful reminder of the many families we've served thanks to your support. Because of you, children continue to receive world-class care, no matter how far from home that care may be.



With so many families, guests and visitors coming through our doors, we want to ensure our House remains secure, but also warm and welcoming for everyone. This year, we expanded our partnership with Children's Wisconsin Public Safety. A dedicated CW officer is now onsite 24/7, 365 days a year, giving families peace of mind so they can focus on what matters most – their child.

We've also grown our family programming to create more moments of joy, comfort and connection, helping families make special memories in the midst of difficult days. Some of these heartfelt moments are shared through our Sounds of Care podcast, which we launched last year.

Our Happy Wheels Hospitality Cart also got a cheerful upgrade, bringing even more smiles to children and parents at Children's Wisconsin. And in our Ronald McDonald Family Room®, we celebrate holidays big and small with decorations, treats and joyful surprises, offering moments of normalcy and delight when they're needed most.

Whether large or small, every moment our families share is made possible because of you. Thank you for bringing hope, comfort and care when it's needed most.



Laurie Bertrand

Laurie Bertrand
President/CEO

Our Mission by the Numbers

through July 31, 2025

 13,658 Nights Served	 9,496 Guest Dinners Served	 2,036 Guests Participated in Family Programming	 5,056 Hospitality Cart Items Selected
2,326 Magic Room Visits 	1,795 Family Comforts & Resources Items Given <i>*Program launched July 14, 2025</i> 	3,677 Family Room Visits 	



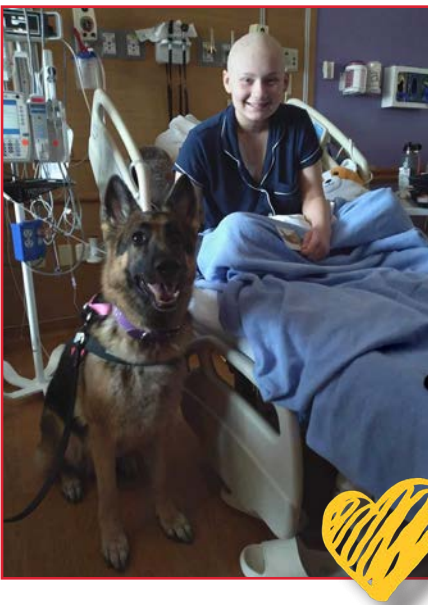
Our podcast, *Sounds of Care: Stories From Our Home Away From Home*, is a great way to stay connected with the House and our mission. If you want to better understand the impact our House has on families with sick or injured children, don't miss an episode! Watch on YouTube, or search "Sounds of Care" anywhere you listen to podcasts!



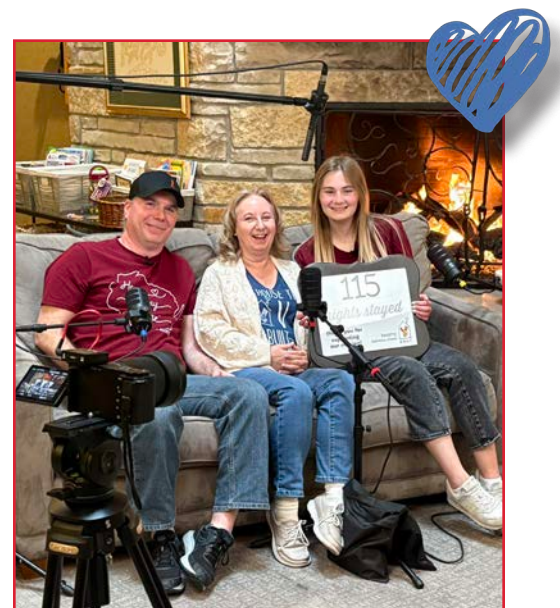
Finding Comfort Amid the Chaos

On November 18, 2022 Brooke Lepper was diagnosed with B-cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Her cancer had progressed and chemotherapy alone was not working. The following January, she was told that she would need to travel from Stevens Point to Milwaukee for a bone marrow transplant. The thought of her and her parents packing up their lives to move over two and a half hours away for a couple months scared her, until she was introduced to the Ronald McDonald House.

The Leppers have called our House "home" for **114 nights** to date. Listen to episode four of the podcast to hear about Brooke's medical journey and how the House supported them through difficult times.



"It just felt like home."



A Chance to Be a Family

Just over a year ago, then 15-year-old Brett suffered a traumatic brain injury from an accident involving a power washer. Having stayed a collective **127 nights** to date, the Jedwabny family – parents, Tyler and Nicole, brother Grant and Brett traveled from Appleton to share their story with our *Sounds of Care* podcast listeners.



"One thing that stands out about this House is the heartbeat of the volunteers and staff, and the genuine care they have for the families."





A Light in the Dark

Our miracle baby, Archer Ronald Mitchler, was born on June 10, 2023 in Milwaukee, WI. He was born at 33 weeks – premature, very ill and diagnosed with a rare condition called Beckwith Wiedemann Syndrome. Archer was fighting for his life and needed to be surrounded by the best care – the medical team at Children's Wisconsin.

We were 127 miles away from our home, and if this wasn't hard enough for my husband and me, Archer's brothers (5, 3 and 1 at the time) needed to be cared for as well. Our social worker suggested we stay at the Ronald McDonald House. Being right across the road from the hospital, we knew this would be the best decision for our family. We were able to be with Archer, get daily reports from the doctors, and Archer's brothers could be with us at the House.

The moment we checked in, it felt easy and natural. Everyone was so gentle and caring, making sure we felt at

home. We got settled into our room and were told supper was going to be served in the Family Dinner Kitchen. But first, we made a trip to the Magic Room. My boys each got to pick a toy and a book and to see their faces light up at such a hard time was so comforting. After all, their lives were just as upside-down as ours were.

Archer's recovery was very up and down, and unknown at times. It was extremely helpful for my husband and me to be surrounded by people that were going through similar situations. The volunteers' and staffs' smiles, care and support truly helped put a little light in our day.

For the older boys, the time at RMHC was happy and easy. From reptile shows and therapy dogs to playgrounds and toys, there were so many experiences they will never forget. They went to a Brewers game, Discovery World and the zoo. Seeing their smiles during such a tragic time helped my husband and I get our mind off of the hospital. Being present in their lives while Archer was sick helped put a smile on our faces as well. The number of good memories we have from our stay help dilute the bad.

Archer was discharged from the hospital after 125 days in the NICU. Today he is thriving – bubbly, outgoing and happy. He loves trying to keep up with his brothers, tagging along to numerous school and sporting events, and best of all, smiling. We will be forever grateful for RMHC and we are so incredibly blessed that we are chasing after our FOUR boys!

This experience has shown us how generous people can be. From donating time, funds, meals and snacks, toys and so much more, RMHC supporters have made us look at life differently. Every June for Archer's birthday, we take our boys shopping for toys to donate to the Magic Room. We want to teach our boys to give back and to keep their RMHC memories alive so that future families can have the extraordinary experience that ours did.

We cannot thank RMHC and all its supporters and donors enough. The generosity and kindness truly helped our family so much, making such a difficult time easier for us.



The families who call our House “home” spend just a fraction of their lives with us, but the impact is long-lasting. We’re still smiling about this update we received from a guest dad earlier this summer.



I don't know how often you receive follow-ups, but I wanted to take a minute and share the enduring gratitude my family and I feel towards you and everything you all do. Three summers ago, my daughter was admitted to Rogers in Oconomowoc with severe depression. In all, she spent nearly six months in that facility. It was a devastatingly difficult time for our family. We live out of state, so coordinating regular visits and the logistics of travel was an added burden to what was an emotionally difficult period.

Throughout that period, RMHC was really there for us. The staff could not have been friendlier or more helpful. During that period, when we came to visit, it was truly a second home for us. Beyond the accommodations, meals and planned activities, the extra support and care were a true blessing.

I am happy to report that our daughter is doing great. She just finished her sophomore year of high school (straight A's!), but more importantly, she has a great group of friends, and is in a really good place. With a lot of hard work and support, she seems to have come out the other end, stronger and more resilient.

I think back on what was easily the most difficult time I have had as a parent, and I see clearly that you all were instrumental in helping to get us through it. I want to thank you for everything you did for our family. I'm not sure how often you hear it, but you do very important and meaningful work. It truly makes a difference.



Dear Staff and Volunteers of
the Ronald McDonald House,

We are writing to offer our deepest gratitude for all you have done for our family during Brynn's treatment here in Wisconsin, far away from our home in North Carolina. Our journey with her illness has been one of the most challenging chapters of our lives. Yet, through this difficulty, the Ronald McDonald House became our anchor – a place of solace, support and unwavering kindness that changed our lives in ways we will never forget.

From the very first day we stepped through your doors, we felt at home. The space you provided us was so much more than a place to sleep – it was a haven. We thoroughly appreciated our room with its thoughtful layout and beautiful kitchen. And we are so thankful for the family meals your incredible volunteers prepared for us... the sense of community they provided at dinnertime was so comforting. And the volunteers who kept every corner of the House clean and organized...their quiet dedication turned this space into a true home away from home.

The Family Services staff deserve a special note of thanks. Your attentiveness and willingness to help with every need, big or small, made us feel supported in ways that went beyond expectation. We cherished all of the various programming you arrange for guests. They gave us a chance to step away from the hospital, breathe and make memories with Brynn that weren't defined by her illness. And we loved having passes from local organizations, like the Wisconsin Athletic Club for yoga classes, the zoo and local museums. All of these outings were pockets of joy in an otherwise heavy season.

You have given us more than a place to stay during Brynn's treatment – you've given us a lifeline, a community and a reason to believe in the goodness of people. The Ronald McDonald House didn't just support us; it held us up when we were at our most fragile. We will carry the memory of your kindness with us forever, a beacon of light from one of our darkest times. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you. You've changed our lives, and we are eternally grateful.

With all our love and appreciation,

Brenda, Brent and Brynn Kelso



Gear Up - Represent the House (and Look Great Doing It!)

If you haven't visited our new online store yet, you're in for a treat. Browse a variety of adult and youth apparel, accessories from hats to tote bags and much more! There's still time to order from our summer collection before we switch things over for fall.

Join the guest families, volunteers and friends of the House who are already showing off their RMHC swag!

Check back seasonally to shop our most current merchandise!



How to Help

There are many ways to support families in need!

Here are a few ideas to consider:



Adopt a Guest Room

Make a Meal



Volunteer

Host an Event



Host a Wish List Drive

**Round-Up for RMHC
at McDonald's®**



As the year comes to a close, it's a great time to think about year-end giving. Here are some helpful tips to guide you in making decisions that benefit both you and the charities you support:

- **Donate to a qualified organization:** Ensure that your donation is made to a 501(c)(3) organization, like Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin.
- **Standard deduction or itemizing?** If you want to maximize the tax impact of your charitable donations, you'll need to itemize your deductions. It may even make sense to "bunch" your contributions into certain years rather than spreading them out evenly.

Options for making the biggest impact:

- **Donor-Advised Fund:** This allows for an immediate tax deduction while the assets grow through investments. You can later grant these funds to charities. It's a smart choice in high-income years because contributions can reduce your tax liability. You can also contribute appreciated securities, which are recorded at fair market value without incurring capital gains tax.
- **IRA Donations:** These can satisfy your required minimum distribution without counting as income, which may reduce your income tax rate.

Please consult your tax advisor for personalized guidance, as tax situations can be complex.

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.



Christmas Fantasy House
November 1 - 9, 2025



Join us as we celebrate the 32nd Annual Christmas Fantasy House in Elm Grove. Stroll through approximately 19,000 square feet of holiday wonder and enjoy the beauty of the season, all while keeping families together!

Visit **christmasfantasyhouse.com** for more information.



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**Your support
keeps families together!**

It costs \$120 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!



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