



RMHC®
Eastern Wisconsin

HomeWord

Keeping Families Close® | Spring 2026

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Accomplishing More, Together ❤️



It is an honor to step into the role of Board Chair for Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin. My connection to the House began in 2017 through my role with BMO Bank, where I was introduced to RMHC® and the important work being done to support families. Despite BMO being a longstanding House partner, there was not much employee involvement. I admittedly didn't know much about Ronald McDonald House®, but once I learned it was more than just a place to stay I was eager to get involved.

The mission of keeping families close while their children receive critical medical care resonates with me on a personal level. When I was eight years old, I was struck by a vehicle while crossing the street after getting off a school bus. I suffered a compound fracture in my leg and spent 32 nights in a hospital bed in traction. The hospital was 90 miles from my hometown and my parents couldn't afford a hotel. They also couldn't imagine leaving me alone. My mother slept on a sofa in my hospital room every night while my father stayed home to work and care for our family.

If a Ronald McDonald House had existed near that hospital, my mother would have had a warm place to sleep, meals to keep her fueled, and a community to support her—comforts that families at RMHC® Eastern Wisconsin receive every single day. That experience is a constant reminder to me of the difference this organization makes.

Since 2017, I have been hooked—by the mission, the extraordinary staff, the dedicated volunteers, and the ever-evolving programs that adapt to meet families' needs. Over the years I've participated in several strategic and planning committees that have strengthened my appreciation for the depth of care and excellence that defines this House.

I joined the Board of Directors in 2020 and from the very beginning I found myself surrounded by an exceptionally talented, generous, and mission driven group of leaders. Each Board member has consistently demonstrated what true servant leadership looks like—putting families first, supporting our staff, and guiding the House with humility, compassion, and unwavering commitment. I am thankful to serve alongside individuals who embody the values that make RMHC Eastern Wisconsin such a special place for families in need.



My wife, Sally, has also embraced this mission wholeheartedly. For the past seven years she has served as a Hospitality Volunteer as well as a Mission Ambassador. Together, we've enjoyed attending many of the House's signature fundraising events including the Gala and my personal favorite, Golfing Fore Our Families.

Outside of work and supporting the House, we enjoy spending time outdoors with our two sons, biking, traveling, and relaxing at our lake home in Waupaca, Wisconsin.

As Board Chair, my goal is simple: to support our amazing staff and volunteers so they can continue providing families with a home away from home during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. I am grateful for the opportunity to lead and excited for what we will accomplish together.


Josh Carlson
Board Chair

♥ Making the Ordinary Extraordinary

With the advent of spring comes sunshine, longer days, and renewed hope for the season ahead. At Ronald McDonald House Charities® Eastern Wisconsin, it means furthering progress on our strategic priorities and the focus of providing essential services that remove barriers, strengthen families and promote healing when children need healthcare.

Our House continues to be a critical resource for those that travel to Milwaukee for world-class care. To meet the unique needs of our guests, we launched the Family Comforts and Resources Center last July. Stocked with everyday necessities like toothbrushes and soap, this program eases worry so that families can focus on being together.

In 2025, over 40% of families that called our House home traveled from Northeastern Wisconsin. We are grateful for this extension of our local community of support that has championed our mission through fundraising and pop tab collections.

Everything we do is possible because of the team of 400+ volunteers that choose to share their time with our House. Through thoughtful group discussion and data analysis, we are making enhancements to the volunteer program that will enrich the experience and provide more opportunities for a variety of interests, abilities, and schedules.

From clean, comfortable beds and home-cooked meals to phone chargers and cotton balls, RMHC® is able to make the ordinary extraordinary thanks to all of you. Your support plays a vital role in making our House a true home away from home.

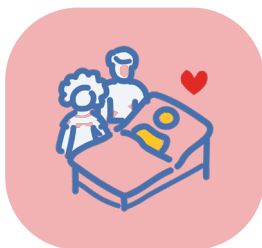
With gratitude,



Laurie Bertrand

Laurie Bertrand
President/CEO

2025-2027 Strategic Priorities



Serve More
Families, Better



Prioritize
People



Enhance
Collaboration



Drive
Engagement

A Place to Land ❤️

by Sara Schnake

It was March 2024 and I was seven months pregnant with my third child, Eden, when I received a referral to the Fetal Medicine Department at Children's Wisconsin. Based on ultrasound findings, my local doctors were concerned the baby had Megacystis-Microcolon-Intestinal hypoperistalsis (MMIH). Don't worry, I had no idea what that meant either. What I did know was that this is a very rare syndrome with a poor prognosis and a NICU stay was imminent.

Within a few weeks, my husband, Jake, and I met with specialists, toured the NICU, and set up the new birth plan. Amid all this, I received a phone call from my mother several states away with news that my father was dying and had months to live.

The weight I felt at this time is almost unexplainable. It wasn't the end to my pregnancy that I wanted. It wasn't the goodbye I wanted with my dad. It was all out of my control. I was overwhelmed, terrified, grieved and confused, trying to stay strong for my baby.



Eden arrived on May 19, 2024, and 10 minutes after delivery was taken to the NICU. After she was settled, we received news that she was cleared of the MMIH diagnosis. While we awaited further news on her condition, Jake and I alternated nights between the lonely NICU to keep Eden company and finding deeper rest at the Ronald McDonald House. Our other kids, Noah and Evelyn, also got to visit, which provided some sense of normalcy for us.

After months of worry and heartache, it was ultimately the House that provided the room for relief. We stayed six nights at RMHC after Eden's team diagnosed her with a severe grade of Vesicoureteral Reflux, a condition that makes her susceptible to urinary tract and kidney infections. Despite two hospital stays at six weeks old due to infections, Eden is almost two and thriving.

I am forever thankful to the collective that makes this House a safe place to land for families like mine.



With a big smile and spunky personality, Lydia Warrens is like any other 8-year-old. She loves riding her bike, dancing, gymnastics, and family trips to Florida.

Unlike most kids her age, Lydia was diagnosed with clear cell sarcoma of the kidney at 2 years old. While navigating 9 rounds of chemotherapy and the COVID-19 pandemic, parents Jake and Sara found solace at our Ronald McDonald House®. Sara recalls, "The House was a place we could rest, gather our thoughts, and prepare to battle another day."

Lydia completed treatment and rang the bell on March 17, 2022. The family enjoyed vacationing and spending time with loved ones. Life was good, until a routine scan in November of 2024 showed the clear cell sarcoma had relapsed to Lydia's chest.

Exactly 3 years after Lydia rang the bell, she underwent surgery. Despite initial uncertainty, her care team was able to remove the tumor. Chemotherapy had successfully killed the cancer and Lydia completed treatment in April of 2025. To celebrate, Lydia and her family vacationed on a Disney cruise.

The Warrens support the House whenever they can, but a family-favorite is collecting pop tabs. Having stayed a total of 41 nights, Sara and Jake are grateful for the financial and emotional support RMHC® provided them.

"Both of Lydia's cancer journeys hit 2 calendar years. That means insurance maximums 4 times, loss of wages, and a lot of time in the car as we journeyed from Kaukauna to Milwaukee. Words cannot describe how crucial of a resource the House was to us. Thank you!"





Healing Hearts ❤️

Sheri and Jason always knew they wanted a family. After struggling with infertility for years, they had son, Lincoln, through medical intervention. When they wanted to try for a second child, it felt almost impossible. After two clinics and several rounds of fertility treatments, they received news that Sheri was pregnant with twins. Sadly, it was a rough pregnancy that resulted in the loss of both babies. "That was and still is the hardest thing I ever went through in my life," says Sheri. "I never thought my heart would heal; I never thought I would get the chance to be a mom to another child."

That all changed when Sheri and Jason became parents through foster care to a newborn baby girl. She was diagnosed with Down syndrome and had holes in her heart. Without hesitation, Sheri told the social worker they would adopt her. "I knew she was meant to be ours without even meeting her."

Twelve years later Isabella, or Izzy as she is affectionately known, is the greatest gift the family has ever received. Sheri and Jason agree, "she is the largest light in our lives and has helped heal our hearts a little bit every day."

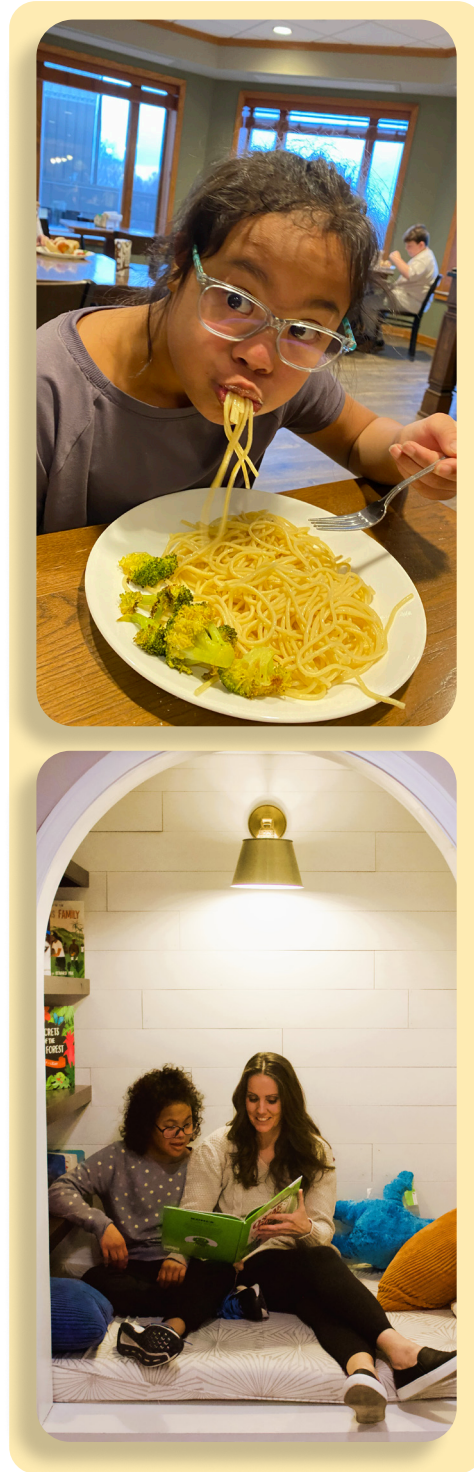
Izzy has overcome several medical issues, the first being with her heart. At just 11 weeks old, she underwent open heart surgery to repair a muscular hole as well as Atrial and Ventricular Septal Defects. The surgery was a success, and the family first came to stay at our Ronald McDonald House® during her recovery in 2013. They stayed again between 2022 and 2023 when Izzy underwent two surgeries for hip dysplasia.

Recovery from these procedures was incredibly taxing on both Izzy and her family, but it was at our Ronald McDonald House they found solace. "When I told Izzy we were staying at the House, she lit up," says Sheri. "It was the only thing that made her happy about going in for surgery."

Throughout the years, Sheri is grateful for the many comforts RMHC Eastern WI has provided her family, from hand-knit baby blankets and Magic Room toys to the many snacks and meal options. When at the House, Izzy loves putting on puppet shows, playing in the Tree Fort Room, and eating lots of snacks, especially potato chips!

Above all, it is the sense of community within the House that makes Sheri feel supported through Izzy's medical journey. "I never really feel alone. There is always something to do and someone to talk to, even if it's a stranger who knows nothing about you. They listen and care like a longtime friend would."

The family anticipates future stays as they travel from Neenah for Izzy's continued care at Children's Wisconsin, but having our Ronald McDonald House to rely on puts them at ease. "Dealing with your child's medical issues can feel scary and out of your control but not having to worry about much else while you are there is truly priceless."





The Helping Hands &

400+ volunteers share their time and talents to help
They have been making a difference



"I get so much more out of my volunteering at the House that I could ever give.
The families are inspiring and the staff is the very best!"



"I leave every shift feeling fulfilled and with a smile on my face – this place brings me so much joy!"



Hearts of our House

keep our House clean, comfortable and welcoming.
in the lives of our families since 1984!



"Volunteering at RMHC allows me to make a positive impact, even if a small one, on someone else's life!"



"When I see the faces of the families light up and they say, 'thank you,' it gives me the motivation to continue doing a great job."

Moments of Joy



Ronald
McDonald
Family
Room[®]

Guests who visit our Ronald McDonald Family Room[®] often carry the heavy weight of fear, exhaustion, and the quiet uncertainty of what is next for their loved one receiving treatment at Rogers Behavioral Health. While they hold onto the hope that clinical care will help, the emotional toll of mental health treatment on families is immense. That is exactly why our Family Room exists. It is a home-like space away from the hospital environment, designed to provide moments of joy during difficult journeys.

From the thoughtful layout to the compassionate care of staff and volunteers, every detail of the Family Room encourages connection. Since opening in August 2021, we have witnessed these connections, big and small. Joy in the laughter shared between siblings as they play videogames, or the quiet moments of reflection within the serenity of campus. It's even in the cups of coffee that caregivers bond over, finding strength in a community that understands what they're going through.

Joy is also found in the ways we incorporate elements of the world outside of the hospital. Holiday celebrations - complete with decorations, themed crafts, and festive treats - create a sense of normalcy. These personal touches can mean everything to a parent who needs a "win" during a hard week, or a child who is missing their birthday while receiving treatment. Being away from home doesn't have to mean missing out on life's special moments.

None of this would be possible without the incredible volunteers and staff who serve as the heartbeat of our mission. They go above and beyond to ensure joy is felt in every corner of the Family Room. It's a common, and beautiful, occurrence for a family to leave feedback sharing how a specific member of the team turned their day around by simply listening or sharing words of encouragement.

Through every craft, snack, and cup of coffee, we aren't just providing a space away from the hospital, we serve as a reminder that even in the midst of a struggle, there is always room for joy.



2025 at a Glance ♥



23,169
Nights Served



6,193
Family Room Visits



430
Volunteers



23,900
Individual
Meals Provided



17,282
Family Comforts & Resources
Items Given



492
Family Programming
Sessions Offered

♥ How to Help ♥

Here are a few ways you can help families in need.
For more information visit rmhc-easternwi.org.



Give Monetarily



Make a Meal



**Round-Up for RMHC
at McDonald's®**



**Donate Wish List
Needs**



**Host an
Event**



Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Eastern Wisconsin, Inc.
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**You help us serve
more families, better!**

It costs over \$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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