



Spring 2024

Love Notes

News & Updates from Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Triangle

Emilio: His Biggest Battle

Life in the U.S. Army could not prepare Emilio for the fight he would face to save his young daughter.

In February 2023, Eva was diagnosed with a form of leukemia. She was transferred to UNC Children's Hospital where her parents were told that she was considered high-risk and that her first year of chemo would likely be more intense than most.

The next day Eva's kidneys failed, and she was moved to the ICU and placed in a medically induced coma.

Looking back now, Emilio reflects on his time in the Army in placing context on Eva's fight for survival.

"In the Army as a Green Beret, I was trained to perform with lack of sleep in bad situations, but let me tell you, nothing prepared me for this."

Hope emerged when Emilio was told of an available room at Ronald McDonald House. "My wife and I made the promise to Eva that she was never going to be alone in the hospital, not even for a minute," Emilio shared. "Getting the room made it possible."

Emilio was overwhelmed by the amenities and also the profound sense of community and support that welcomed his family. In his words, "Not only did I see hope, but I felt it."

But Eva and her family still had a long road ahead. Four months after starting chemotherapy, Eva's organs were too damaged to continue treatment. Desperate for alternatives, Emilio researched a new form of immunotherapy called CAR T, which held the promise of hope for Eva. More importantly, UNC Children's offered the treatment.

Eva's parents spent seven months at Ronald McDonald House while she underwent treatment. Here, Emilio believed the generosity, selflessness, and community within the walls of the House made him a better father and husband.

October, Eva's modified T Cells were infused back into her bloodstream and began fighting the cancer cells. On February 19, 2024, Eva rang the bell signifying the end of treatment — one full year ahead of schedule.

"My wife, her older sister, and I will be grateful for the rest of our lives," Emilio said. "As for me, I will dedicate the rest of mine to looking after her."



Emilio with daughters Emily and Eva on the day Eva completed treatment at UNC Children's Hospital.



The Kolodner family of Maryland travels to Duke for their daughter's specialized enzyme treatment for Pompe disease. Duke Children's Hospital is a leading center for treatment and research of this rare genetic disorder.

The Kolodners have stayed at RMH of Durham off and on since their daughters diagnosis in 2019.

Hi Oie and the RMH team!

We are so happy to be able to send this message to you all to truly show our appreciation for the work that you guys do!

We're the Kolodner family joining you from Silver Spring, MD. We have been part of a research study for our daughter, Lena, who was one of the first children caught in Maryland's rare disease newborn screening for Pompe disease back in 2019.

Our first trip to the RMH was February, 2020. We were fresh into our daughter's diagnosis and still struggling to put things into perspective.

Upon entry, the RMH staff member greeting us showed us to our room and along the way told us about the ceiling tiles. We began to feel the weight of the building as we looked down all the halls of each floor knowing we were just looking at a fraction of the people that have stayed here and what they had to go through to even make it here.

Tribute Gift Honorees

January 1 - April 1

Jaxon Barone
The Blaskovitch Family
Callie and Colton Blazer
Rose Boyarsky
Linda Browner
Susan Camaret
Fallon Clifford
Chris and Jessica Covington
Lucas Cranford
Delaney Davis
Corrine Dearmitt
The Dennis Family
Adelyn Emory
Arnetta Evans
Travis Fife
Garrick Francis
Austen Griffin
Jackie Griffith
Patsy and Ron Groover
Caressa, Eric, and Emir Harris
Kayla and Riles Inman
Avery Grace Kalk
Shawn Kapfer
Makenna Kuhn
Rita Macdonald

Mary Catherine McGee
Everett McNaughton
Sadie and Ivory Moore
Ben and Amelia Myers
Art Pappas
Brody Pereira
Lisa and Ron Powell
Ali Qadir
Brenda Schafer
Rachel Singletary
Jonathan Smith
TrialCard
Charlotte Triantafellow
Kathleen Welker
Danielle and Greg Wilson

Memorial Gift Honorees

January 1 - April 1

Robert Andrews
Leslie Francine Atkinson
Wells McRae Cain
Christopher Choplin
Joseph L. Covington III
Margaret Dupree
Dolly and Ken Ellmann
Jack Gissel
James Glod

Ray Hardy
Joshua Helm
Ellie Holloway
Chyler Huebner
Oliver Graham Parker Huff
Donna Huskey
Asha Kamath
Peter and Lana Kohut
Kelsey Lawson
Faith Longley
Everest Marie Raye Maltry
David McCullough
James Neel
Daniel Mac Neela
Anthony Nicolaou
Niko Prak Pandiyan
Jan Peek
David Riley
Leonard Saleeby
Melissa Sheasley
Thomas Spruill
Richard Standriff
Ronald G. Summers
Audrey Jane Wood
Selah Wren



Over dinner, we sat next to two other families that had both been here for several months over the course of the last few years. They told us their own reasons for being here, which included intense suffering for their children as well as literal life or death decisions that they were knowingly going to have to face in the near term to determine their child's survivability.

Needless to say, that conversation was a reality check for us and really spoke to our hearts.

We've since been back 3 more times, each time experiencing the same atmospheric blend of joy, sorrow, and hope. Though, we have noticed that with each additional visit there's always a fresh wave of joy and hope to be felt.

We love the mix of steady volunteers that serve as the continuing threads of our stays paired with the happy randomness of the dinner volunteers always bringing something different to the table – both in terms of literal food and their conversation and spirit.

We can't thank you enough for the comfort, the laughs, and the shoulder to lean on you've given us over the years. Leaving is always the hard part because "thank you" just doesn't seem to cut it. But, for all the ways you've touched our lives, know that we're endlessly grateful.

We're happy to let you know that Lena is doing phenomenally well. Thanks to this research study and others, the primary physician has since released a second version of the enzyme Lena needs to keep her muscles healthy, enabling her to live as normal a life as possible.

We always tell our friends, if angels walk this earth, they work at the Ronald McDonald House.

*Much love,
The Kolodners*

Pompe disease is a rare genetic disorder that cause progressive weakness of the heart and skeletal muscles.

Carolyn: A Heart for Helping Children

Carolyn Southerland is committed to children.

Her journey started as a girl, when she dreamed of becoming a teacher so she could help children. But Carolyn became an educator and so much more, including reading specialist for Orange County Schools, consultant for the NC Department of Public Instruction, volunteer at UNC Children's Hospital, and

volunteer for Ronald McDonald House Charities. Carolyn found RMHC in 2018 through her work with the Junior Women's Club. "I wanted to give back to the community that had served me," she explained.

Beginning her service to RMHC as a Wednesday morning front-desk volunteer at Ronald McDonald House of Chapel Hill, she soon felt drawn to extend her support to the Ronald McDonald Family Room inside UNC Children's Hospital.

"I feel more connected with the families now that I volunteer at the hospital, too," Carolyn shared.

Whether walking a child to the toy room to brighten their day or listening to a caregiver after a long day at the hospital, Carolyn consistently serves families with boundless joy. As you watch her with RMH guest families, you get a glimpse of the girl who wanted to help children.



Annual Gratitude Report

April 2024

At the time of the writing of this report to the community, we're nearing the peak of the NCAA basketball season. Our state shines this year with 3 schools representing the Triangle in the Sweet Sixteen.

This region of excellence reflects the same footprint of excellence of Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Triangle.

The stars this season are you and other friends who get up each day resolved to love and support seriously ill children and their families as they fight big battles.

On behalf of the 96 families who will stay with us tonight, we thank you for your big love!

With gratitude,



Oie Osterkamp, CEO



You make this mission possible!



1603
families
welcomed for
residential
hospitality



29,359
cost-free
nights of
care for
families



43,859
meals served
to children &
families



15,729
in-hospital
respite
visits



3,284
volunteers &
21,043
hours of service



\$5.38M
cost savings
to families
for meals &
lodging alone

Incalculable
cups of coffee & loads
of laundry



Invaluable
the support of our
community of love

Key pediatric treatment areas

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Hematology/Oncology, Pediatric ICU,
Transplant, Cardiology, Neurology

Guest family hometowns

98 NC Counties, 32 U.S. States, and 4 Countries

Ronald McDonald House of Chapel Hill
Ronald McDonald House of Durham
Ronald McDonald House at WakeMed
Ronald McDonald Family Room at Duke Children's
Ronald McDonald Family Room + Hospitality Kiosk at UNC Children's
Ronald McDonald Family Room at WakeMed Children's
Snack Stop at UNC Children's Specialty Services – Raleigh

Worldwide, there are 389 **residential Ronald McDonald Houses** and
270 **in-hospital Ronald McDonald Family Room programs**.
The first House in NC opened in Durham in 1980.

2023 was a banner year. On July 1, RMH of Chapel Hill and RMH of Durham & Wake made official our long-time partnership in mission when we joined forces to become **Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Triangle**.

There have been internal changes, such as the software and systems we use to support families. Our mantra has been *Same House, Same Heart*. And it's true! A change of name has not changed our substance.

Our programs and staff are still here to support you. In fact, in 2023, we worked toward opening a new Ronald McDonald Hospitality Kiosk to support families at UNC's expanded Newborn Critical Care Center. While the opening was celebrated in early 2024, much work happened last year to make this possible.

It's our honor walk with you on this expanding mission of hospitality and hope!



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You've likely seen them at RMHC events and in the community. The Red Shoe Crew is the iconic corporate leadership team for RMHC in the Triangle.



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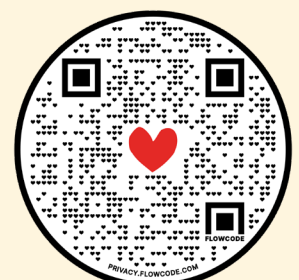
Rachel Urban
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RMHC Board
President Tom
Cavender of
WakeMed
proudly sports
his red shoes.

Learn more:



In 2023, RMHC friends gave more than **\$6.1M in cash and in-kind donations** to support the families of seriously ill children.

See the complete donor list & our audited financials: RMHCTriangle.org

Room + Area Sponsors

Room sponsors offer overnight hospitality to RMH families. We are enormously grateful!

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House Heroes invest \$25,000 or more in program operations.



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
of the Triangle

Business Office
506 Alexander Avenue
Durham, NC 27705

Jump in to our
community of **love.**

Annual Gratitude Report
enclosed.

Snack attack.

Become a Ronald McDonald House **Pantry Partner** today!

3 ways to help:

- 1.** Send items from our **Amazon** shopping list
- 2.** Pick up critical wish-list items on your **weekly grocery run** and deliver to Ronald McDonald House
- 3.** Hold a **wish-list drive** in your community or workplace

<https://bit.ly/RMHCWishes>
Info@RMHCTriangle.org



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