

# A Year in Review 2023



Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®  
Southwest Florida





## **FULL-TIME STAFF**

Laura Ragain  
President & CEO

Illeeny Farese  
Director, Volunteer & Family  
Services

Leanna Gonzalez  
Director, Administrative  
Operations

Karen Marshall  
Director, House Operations &  
Services

Julie Todaro  
Director of Development

Amy Velez  
Director, Marketing &  
Creative Design

## **PART-TIME STAFF**

Marvin Pierce  
Maintenance

## **WEEKEND MANAGERS**

Christine Jabczynski  
Jeanne Keyser  
Nancy Pavlik  
Janet Ruby

## **2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Executive Committee

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Richard DeStefano

*Vice President*  
Deana Homs

*Vice President*  
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*Treasurer*  
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Members  
Lee Bellamy  
David Koester  
Emad Salman, MD  
G. David Schiering  
Ron Scudder



## A Letter from our President & CEO, Laura Ragain



Dear Friends,

As we enter this new year, I want to express our deepest gratitude on behalf of Ronald McDonald House Charities Southwest Florida. Your unwavering support, generosity, and dedication to our mission have been the cornerstone of our ability to provide comfort, care, and hope to countless families in need.

Throughout the past year, your contributions have profoundly impacted the lives of families facing unimaginable challenges. Your kindness has provided them with a "home-away-from-home," a haven where they can find solace, support, and the strength to navigate the most difficult moments of their lives.

Your donations have helped sustain our operations and fueled our mission to create a nurturing environment filled with love, compassion, and understanding. Every smile on a child's face, every sigh of relief from a parent, is a tribute to the incredible difference your generosity has made.

As we approach the momentous 50th anniversary of RMHC this year, I am both excited and nostalgic. This milestone stands as a testament to the enduring impact and legacy of our collective efforts worldwide. With your continued support, we aim to expand our reach and deepen our impact in the coming year. Together, we will strive to extend our services to even more families in need, providing them with essential support and resources during their most trying times.

As we embark on this new year, filled with hope and possibilities, we carry your kindness in our hearts. Thank you for being the pillars of strength behind Ronald McDonald House Charities Southwest Florida. Wishing you a year filled with joy, good health, and countless moments of happiness.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laura Ragain".

Laura Ragain  
President & CEO





# Our 2023 Impact



## 2,915 FAMILY NIGHT STAYS AT THE RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE®

The Ronald McDonald House provides lodging, meals, and other supportive services for families with children receiving medical treatment. Families can stay at a Ronald McDonald House anywhere from one night to several months, depending on their family's needs.



## 2,221 PATIENT FAMILY VISITS TO THE RONALD MCDONALD FAMILY ROOM®

The Ronald McDonald Family Room at Golisano Children's Hospital provides food, refreshments, laundry facilities and a relaxation area for family members of hospitalized children.



## 7,000+ KIDS SERVED BY THE RONALD MCDONALD CARE MOBILE® PROGRAM

The Ronald McDonald Care Mobile Program provides dental care through our partnership with two health care providers to underserved children. Of the 40 RMHC Care Mobile programs worldwide, we proudly have two to serve our community.



## 331 MEALS SERVED TO FAMILIES

The Family Meal Program provides support to families who are taking care of their sick children, and often don't have the time, funds, or energy to prepare a home-cooked meal. After a long day at the hospital, a hot meal is a blessing!



## 8,269 VOLUNTEER HOURS DONATED

We are so grateful for the many volunteers who dedicate their time, talent, knowledge, and resources to help us serve families and children who need us the most.

The mission of Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Southwest Florida is to create, find, and support programs that directly improve the health and well-being of children and their families in Southwest Florida. When a child is sick, the entire family needs comfort and support. We strongly believe that when families are together, they cope better, which is why we make it our mission that no family has to deal with their child's medical crisis alone.



# Home-Away-From-Home

With the Ronald McDonald House®, families don't have to worry about where to stay if they are far from home. Our "home-away-from-home" allows families to stay near their child at little to no cost.

At the Ronald McDonald House in Southwest Florida, families enjoy home-cooked meals, receive gracious hospitality from staff and volunteers, rest, and recharge to remain strong for their child—all just minutes from the hospital where their child is receiving care. This shared environment also allows families to interact with other families going through similar experiences.





# We appreciate you!

Dear Friends,

As we enter 2024, I am grateful for our remarkable journey together this past year. Your dedication, resilience, and collective spirit have defined the very essence of our volunteer community. Each of you brings unique skills, perspectives, and enthusiasm to the lives of those we serve. Your commitment to our mission shone brightly, illuminating the path toward our ever-changing days, but your support remained consistent. Your selfless contributions, whether in time, skills, or heartfelt effort, have woven a tapestry of impact that extends far beyond the confines of each task.

Together, we've accomplished extraordinary feats and touched the lives of many. Your enthusiasm and passion have been the driving force behind our shared mission, fostering a sense of unity and purpose that is truly inspiring. As we reflect on the moments and milestones of 2023, it's clear that your individual and collective efforts have left an undeniable mark. You are the heartbeat of our volunteer family, and I want to extend my appreciation for the dedication you've demonstrated throughout the year.

May the coming year be filled with new opportunities, continued growth, and fulfilling aspirations to make our mission what it is. I look forward to embarking on another chapter of impact alongside this exceptional group of volunteers. I wish you a new year filled with hope and purpose!

Sincerely,  
Illeeny Farese





## FAMILY MEAL PROGRAM

### *Meals Made with Love*

The Family Meal Program provides support to families who are taking care of their sick children, and often don't have the time, funds, or energy to prepare a home-cooked meal. After a long day at the hospital, a hot meal is a blessing! Whether it's a group of friends, family members, students, or colleagues, the meals our volunteers prepare daily mean everything to our families! We are so very thankful to all of our chefs!









# An Unexpected Friendship



"A year ago this December my daughter developed back pain that quickly turned debilitating. We searched for a cause and none could be found so, in March 2023, she was diagnosed with Amplified Musculoskeletal Pain Syndrome. There are no effective medications. They can only recommend physical therapy and counseling, but those are slow to take effect and the pain comes back quickly if the child can achieve remission at all. After research and mom-sourcing, I found Scrambler Therapy, with the top doctor in it being in Bonita Springs, FL.

I knew immediately this was our only choice for letting my child live with less pain. This is a treatment not covered by insurance, and it costs thousands of dollars, not to mention the travel from our home in southwest Louisiana (and care for our pets back home). We raised enough money through fundraising to cover treatment and the gas money, but I didn't know how to cover the remaining funds needed for accommodations and food. Dr D'Amato's office sent our referral to you all and, on Halloween morning, I heard the most beautiful words from Karen - you are accepted. We had a room at the RMH!

We arrived in November for our 2 week stay. Karen and Marvin made us feel at home immediately. We met Illeny the following day and she showed us more of the ins and outs. From the volunteers to the staff, everyone welcomed us and provided wonderful encouragement and love. We met another family staying, with a child undergoing the same treatment for a similar condition, and it was a God send. We were meant to be there with that family, meant to develop a lifelong friendship. The girls became fast friends, and the moms were able to bond every night. The staff allowed our girls to bake crazy things in the kitchen (we cleaned up - promise!), and let us take over the living room with puzzles and giggles. It was therapeutic in a way I can't describe, for all of us.

We have now been home for several weeks. The other family and mine remain in daily contact, and plan on visiting one another (they live in another state) soon. My daughter came home in almost complete remission from her pain, which was remarkable. I have cried on more than one occasion, watching her do things she hasn't been able to do - this includes giving her hugs. We can now hug our child, and you all are a part of that. There are no words to thank each of you - from the volunteers who cooked, cleaned, or rolled towels to the staff who greeted us every day. Don't stop being who you are and doing what you do! You make a difference! I now recommend RMH to any families looking at Scrambler Therapy in Bonita Springs, and we seek to donate to RMH for all the help they gave us. Thank you so much!" -Christi Jeffels







# A Day Fit for Royal Tea



We debuted our inaugural afternoon Tea Party on November 16, 2023. Themed a "Royal Tea Party", it was a magical afternoon filled with elegance, generosity, laughter, and a sense of community at the majestic Shangri-La Springs. The day began with a tour of the boutique hotel's organic garden, followed by a delightful prosecco reception in the courtyard. Our 100+ guests were then whisked away to a world of culinary delights and piping hot tea in the beautiful Octagon Room. Guests were treated to a lovely fashion show by Gretchen Scott Designs, where the clothing was modeled by mothers and children who previously stayed at RMHC SWFL! We also showcased a fabulous auction of stunning hand-painted teapots created by local artists. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and community, we raised over \$31,000.

We are indebted to all who made our event a "Royal" success, and we send a heartfelt thank you to our sponsors (listed below), our amazing event Chair, Suzanne Costa, our wonderful committee members, volunteers, and the talented artists who donated their talents to create the lovely auction teapots.

Photos of the day can be found by clicking [HERE](#).



## ROYAL MAJESTY SPONSOR:



## ROYAL HIGHNESS SPONSORS:



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## DUCHESS SPONSOR:

Margaret Strawser

## UNDERWRITERS:

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MidWest One Bank- Teacups  
Patricia Bander- Centerpieces  
Peter & Marianne Kircher- Champagne Reception

## IN-KIND SPONSOR:

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DIGITAL

## MEDIA SPONSOR:

GULFSHORE LIFE

## RAFFLE SPONSORS:

Marilyn's JEWELERS  
YAMRON JEWELERS

Kew West  
FL Keys South - Key West - Miami Island

## FASHION SHOW BY:

GRETCHEN SCOTT  
Lynch New York - Long Ago - Celine - Yves Saint Laurent - Christian Dior - Louis Vuitton







# A Tee-rific Day at our Golf Fundraiser

Our 6th Annual Grampy's Pro-Am Golf Tournament was a Hole-in-One! Over 100 players joined together on Friday, December 8th, at Fiddlestick Golf & Country Club to play golf on a gorgeous day and enjoyed fun on-course events, a raffle and ball drop, delicious cuisine, and camaraderie. One lucky golfer celebrated his birthday with a hole-in-one! It was an exciting day.

This year, we had our most successful golf tournament and raised over \$110,000, thanks to the support of our sponsors, individuals, and our event host, Grampy's Charities.

Thank you to all who attended and our wonderful sponsors. Photos of the day can be found by clicking [HERE](#).



**PRESENTING SPONSOR**



**EAGLE SPONSORS**



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"We are very grateful to God and the house of Ronald McDonald for allowing us the privilege and blessing of being united, my husband, my son and I and at the same time so close to the Hospital where our baby is, which makes things much easier.

It is a beautiful place, full of love, generosity, kindness, and we really feel accompanied by a large family that has been the staff members of the house for all this time. Thank you for everything you do. Thank you very much, may God continue to bless you more and more." -

Angie Camacho



## HOLIDAYS

### *'Tis the Season...*

Embracing the spirit of love, joy, and togetherness, RMHC SWFL hosted their annual Holiday Wish List drive, a heartfelt initiative that helps past and current Ronald McDonald House guest families in need during this gift-giving season. The turnout this year was incredible! With your generosity, about 50 children were blessed with around five gifts each this holiday season! Thanks to everyone who participated by donating gifts, clothes, food, books, and more!









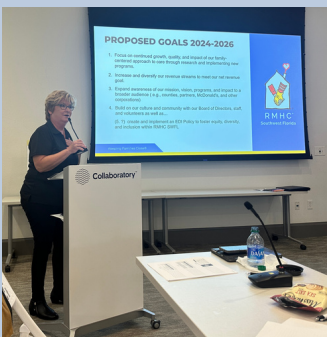
# Beyond the Boardroom: Our Ongoing Journey in Continuing Education



In April, several of our team members attended the Florida Summit in Jacksonville, hosted at the Jacksonville Ronald McDonald House. Representatives from all eight Chapters in Florida convened for collaborative sessions focused on brainstorming, idea sharing, procedural discussions, and strategic planning for the future. While continuous education opportunities are always available to our staff, the in-person gatherings prove to be the most enjoyable. The event featured group sessions dedicated to global strategic goals, role-specific break-out discussions, a guided tour of the Jacksonville House, and engaging team-building activities, fostering an atmosphere of laughter, camaraderie, and mutual understanding. Being part of the RMHC family is a true privilege, as our colleagues consistently exhibit motivation, inspiration, and a dedicated commitment to the well-being of our guest families. We are so thankful to the Jacksonville House for hosting all of us!



In July, our team traveled to Chicago for the RMHC Conference of the Americas (COTA). This marked our first in-person COTA gathering since 2016, and the excitement leading up to the event was surpassed only by the vibrant energy experienced throughout all four days of the conference. Spending time with colleagues, from Chile in the south to Canada in the north and everywhere in between, made our time together truly special. The camaraderie was palpable as we engaged with friends and peers, exchanging insights and learning valuable lessons from one another and the distinguished guest speakers. The conference covered a diverse range of topics, including sessions on branding and marketing, global megatrends, finance, and leadership. This comprehensive approach ensured that there was valuable content for every attendee. As we reflect on this enriching experience, our anticipation grows for the International Conference in July 2024, where RMHC will celebrate its 50th anniversary!



In October, the Board of Directors and staff members of RMHC SWFL held a Strategic Planning Retreat with the aim of providing the best possible support to families and children and increasing the organization's revenue to drive progress. The discussions involved program updates, growth objectives, and strategies to be implemented over the next three years. During the retreat, four main goals were laid out, including the expansion of the organization's programs, fundraising opportunities, marketing, and a commitment to culture and community. Going forward, the team will continuously monitor, evaluate, and revise as needed, analyze, adapt, and report their progress over the next three years.



# Year of Giving

Each year, we rely on the generosity of our community, businesses, foundations, and individuals to help us continue our mission to serve families and children in need through our fundraising efforts. We are so grateful for the continued support of so many. In 2023, we raised over \$1,100,000 through special events and community support.

A portion of the funds we raised were through generous grants from Suncoast Credit Union Foundation, Alpha Delta Pi Sorority, Macy's, Papa John's Foundation, & Golden State Foods Foundation. We also raised over \$10,000 through our Giving Tuesday Campaign, thanks to the generous support of individuals in our community! In addition, the community's strong support was once again evident through McDonald's round-up program, which, coupled with McDonald's ongoing fundraising campaigns, raised over \$165,000 to support RMHC SWFL.

It was a banner year of fundraising events, including our Annual Grampy's Sporting Clays Tournament, Storybook Ball, 6th Annual Grampy's Pro-Am Golf Tournament, and our inaugural Royal Tea Party. We exceeded our event revenue goals and couldn't have done that without the outstanding support from dedicated sponsors, attendees, and volunteers.

As always, we are most grateful for our generous donors and amazing volunteers for their ongoing commitment and dedication to our mission.

Thank you to all! Together, we are able to make a difference!





# Gone but not forgotten...

The De Pino-Camacho family resided at the Ronald McDonald House for more than a year as their son, David, bravely confronted a prolonged and arduous battle. Regrettably, in July 2023, young David earned his angel wings, leaving our hearts heavy with sorrow for this resilient family. Their journey has exemplified love, strength, compassion, and kindness, making it particularly challenging to witness their grief. Our privilege was celebrating David's first birthday at the hospital—a poignant memory etched in our hearts, surrounded by all those who cherished him deeply. Following David's passing, a touching tree planting ceremony took place at the House, honoring his memory and providing his family a serene place to reconnect with him whenever they wish. To Angie, Elias, and Emanuel, you are forever a part of our family, and our support is unwavering. May your precious angel rest in peace, his spirit enduring in your hearts. You have our deepest condolences and boundless love.



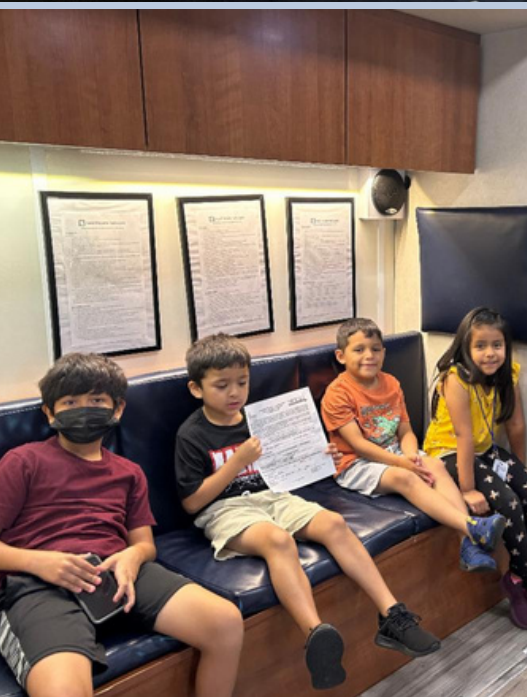
While Paul may physically no longer be with us, the lasting impression he made on everyone's hearts will live on forever. Paul was the BEST! He always made us laugh and taught us so much because he was such an intelligent man. He told the best stories! He was the most giving person, always willing to lend a hand, and his perseverance was admirable. It was an honor and a privilege to know Paul. He is sorely missed. RIP Paul Tobin













*Together*

WE CAN DO  
BIG THINGS.



**RMHC**<sup>®</sup>  
Southwest Florida

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