



Ronald
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House®
Rochester, MN

news from the heart

OCTOBER 2022

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Artistic Expressions (Rock Rapids, Iowa)



Surprises are generally good, but when Ethan was born...it was a challenging surprise for him and his parents.

But they quickly learned Ethan was “extremely lucky.”

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

Dear friends and families of the House,

I am thrilled to be sharing a note with you as I start as the Chief Executive Officer for the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester. In the first couple weeks, I have been both inspired and humbled by the conversations and interactions with the families at the House, donors, and volunteers. It has highlighted what makes this House so special—the people. Thanks to your time, talents, and treasures, families and caregivers can continue to rely on the house in Rochester as a home away from home, where they can focus on what's important—the health and healing of their children.

I follow the footsteps of the founding families that started the House, the thousands of volunteers, community partners, and donors who built, expanded, and brought this amazing House to where it is today. Each of us are caretakers of this incredible mission. Our mission will remain providing a home away from home and support for our families seeking medical care for their children. We will continue to find ways to extend and deepen service to families in need with the generous support from each of you. The future is bright for our mission thanks to all of you!



Now, a little about me. My wife and I relocated to Rochester in 2009. Our “temporary” stay is now on year 13 and is the place where we set our roots and have raised our four boys. You’ll likely find us out exploring many of the trails, parks, and all the outdoor fun that the Rochester area has to offer.

As I get started in my role, I would love to hear from you as our community partners, donors, volunteers, and families of the House. Please feel free to reach out today and connect. Thank you again for all you do to support our families and making this House one that love truly built.

Yours in service to our families and children,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Mueller".

Nick Mueller, Chief Executive Officer

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester, Minnesota, provides a home away from home and gives support to families seeking medical care for their children.



Ronald
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Rochester, MN



Surprises are generally good, but when Ethan was born...it was a challenging surprise for him and his parents.

"You can't see it on an ultrasound," said Kim, Ethan's mom. Doctors in our hospital had never seen anything like it. No one knew what it was or what was in store for him."

Ethan was born with giant congenital nevus—a disorder characterized by skin lesions (spots) and possible tumors. He has thousands of spots of all shapes and sizes all over his skin and even a large nevus that makes it look like he is wearing a pair of brown shorts. It stretches from the middle of his back to just above his knees. Ethan also has neurocutaneous melanosis, which means he also has spots on his brain. It is a rare disorder, affecting 1 in 500,000 people.

But they quickly learned Ethan was "extremely lucky."

"When he was born, he had several very large lumps across his back that were the size of large eggs," Kim said. "We did not know if these growths were cancerous. We worried about his spinal cord and brain being affected. But it was not the worst-case scenario."

Because the hospitals near their Iowa hometown do not have pediatric dermatology or neurology departments, the family traveled to Mayo Clinic in Rochester for the first time when Ethan was only 10 days old. They traveled to Rochester 13 times in the first year for clinic visits, MRI's, and multiple procedures with a pediatric plastic surgeon.



[Artistic Expressions](#)
(Rock Rapids, Iowa)

Ethan's first surgery was when he was just four months old, to remove the very large growths across his back. Another surgery resulted in more than 25 inches of incisions up and down his little legs and back. The pain was "excruciating." But his

condition slowly improved, and he experienced no setbacks.

“Ethan has grown so much,” said Kim. “He is resilient. He is an amazing kid.”

Appointments have gradually declined over time, as Ethan now needs only one or two visits per year. It is an upward and positive trend. They are always on the lookout for signs that one of the nevus spots could signal a change to skin cancer and they watch to make sure the brain spots do not cause neurological issues. But he is blessed to have no issues to date.



[Artistic Expressions \(Rock Rapids, Iowa\)](#)

Kim heard generalities about Ronald McDonald Houses, but she did not know specifics. They did not stay at the House on their initial visit, but stayed for the first time after Ethan's surgery when he was four months old...and have stayed at the House on 11 separate occasions over the past 13 years.



She described walking through the doors as “incredible,” particularly for parents in very stressful and scary times. Clean spaces, welcoming faces, and stocked food pantries made the family feel safe, comfortable, and “at home.”

While there is nothing normal about being away from home and dealing with a health crisis, Kim said the House provides families with a “glimpse of normalcy.” Families can prepare and eat meals together in the kitchens and unwind in the living spaces, like they would at home. The family has celebrated holidays and

even birthdays at the House and Ethan “always felt special when he was there.”



“Ethan wasn’t scared when he was at the House,” said Kim. “He loves staying at the House more than a hotel. Ethan played with the Thomas the Train table for hours when he was little and, now that he is older, enjoys the Game Room. Coming back to the House was always an incentive for Ethan to get up and moving after surgery, so he could get discharged from the hospital sooner.

And the House proximity to Saint Marys Campus is important.

“We could run home and eat, nap, shower,” said Kim. “We did not want to leave Ethan alone for very long at the hospital. And we did not have to... because of the House.”

Kim said House volunteers are “amazing; always investing in the kids.”

“Their time and effort are generous donations,” Kim said.

The House is supported by many generous donors and companies, both in the Rochester community and beyond. And while Rochester residents may not stay at the House, they probably know someone who has or will need the House at one time or another. Their financial and in-kind support is so important.

“It is humbling how much Rochester and the surrounding communities invest in the House,” said Kim. “Donors have a direct impact on families. And it truly shows community pride.”

“The House is invaluable.”

Fast forward 13 years and Ethan is a smart, energetic teenage boy. He is in school and enjoys activities, such as swimming, watching dirt track racing, and sports activities—particularly after a recent undefeated season in junior high football.

And he loves helping others.

Since their first stay in 2009, Ethan and his family have



collected pop tabs to raise awareness and support for the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester. They have donated approximately 2000 pounds of pop tabs over 13 years. Friends and family, community members and strangers collect pop tabs for Ethan and the House.



“We love coming home to bags of pop tabs—large or small—sitting on our doorstep,” Kim said. “It’s an honor to give back to a place that has given us so much, on behalf of our friends, family, and community.”

“It does not cost anything, and it is an easy and free way for people to give back to the House. And it makes a difference. One pop tab can turn into something more—so much more.”

“Contributing to the House gives every single person the ability to be a part of something bigger. The House changes people. It makes us better. I like to say that we are better people after getting the opportunity to be inspired by the House.”

Ethan’s prognosis is positive—his skin spots have some minimal negative side effects and people are naturally curious about his spots. But he deals with the challenges with maturity and grace.

“Many people do not know his story; they only see his skin,” said Kim. “But the House knows him; and the House sees him.”



FALL FESTIVAL

The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester hosted the annual Fall Festival for children and families!





Activities included: pumpkin painting, campfires, wood sign painting with Canvas & Chardonnay, outdoor games, candy guessing jars, scavenger hunt, cookie decorating, and so much more!

give

TO THE
MAX



Nov. 17, 2022

The Ronald McDonald House of Rochester is participating in the 14th annual Give to the Max Day on Thursday, Nov. 17, 2022! Early giving starts Nov. 1.

Last year, your generosity on Give to the Max Day helped raise more than \$56,000 to support children and families!

This year, once again, donors to the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester will have the opportunity to DOUBLE THEIR GIFT!

The Board of Trustees is matching the first \$30,000 in donations dollar for dollar!

Watch your email and our social media accounts for more information and help continue to make hope and healing possible at the House.

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HEARTS & DIAMONDS SPECTACULAR

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The **20th Annual Hearts & Diamonds Spectacular**
is Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023!

Registration opens at noon on Thursday, Dec. 1 at www.rmhmhmn.org.

Ronald McDonald House of Rochester forges new path under Mueller's leadership

As the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester, Minnesota, prepares for the future as one of the largest Houses in the world, Nick Mueller is leading the organization as its new Chief Executive Officer.

The Board of Trustees selected Mueller, a career nonprofit professional with a background in community engagement and development, following a comprehensive nationwide search.

"Nick possesses the knowledge, experience, and leadership skills to enhance the House's mission for the children and families it serves," said Hilary Stonelake-Curtis, Board President. "The House will excel as a both an organization and a community partner under his direction."



Nick Mueller, Chief Executive Officer

The change comes as the House embraces its role as a premiere Ronald McDonald House within the Ronald McDonald House Charities system. The 70-room Ronald McDonald House of Rochester is the largest Ronald McDonald House in the state of Minnesota, the 13th largest in the country (186 in the U.S.), and the 18th largest in the world (380 worldwide).

Mueller joins the House from Mayo Clinic, where he served most recently as Vice Chair of Development Operations, managing development's operations spanning three sites for more than 200 staff. Mayo experienced unprecedented growth while Nick filled three positions (Interim-Chief Development Officer and Director, Annual and Mid-Level Giving) from 2017-2022.

Prior to his time at Mayo Clinic, Mueller was the Managing Director, Community Engagement for the American Cancer Society. He was with the organization for seven years in three other capacities (Senior Director, Community Relations Manager, and Community Events Fundraiser).

A resident of Rochester since 2009, Mueller received his Master of Business Administration degree from Augsburg College, after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from Concordia College in Moorhead.

Founded in 1980 as Northland House, the Ronald McDonald House of Rochester, Minnesota, provides a home away from home and offers support to families seeking medical care for their children. For more information, visit www.rmhmhmn.org.





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OCT 31 - NOV 18

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Rochester, MN

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UPCOMING EVENTS

GIVE TO THE MAX	Thursday, November 17, 2022
20TH ANNUAL HEARTS & DIAMONDS SPECTACULAR	Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023 Registration opens at 12 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 1
CANS FOR KIDS	Saturday, March 18, 2023

SHARE YOUR STORY!

Each family who has stayed at the House has a unique and beautiful story!

Your story is the reason people support the House!

Contact [Jacob Dreyer, Communications Director](#), for more information.

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