OUR FACILITY IS GROWING FROM 30 TO 54 BEDROOMS, AND ALL AREAS OF THE HOUSE WILL BE EXPANDED AND RENOVATED TO SERVE MORE FAMILIES. IT WAS A MEMORABLE DAY AS WE REFLECTED ON THE RICH HISTORY OF OUR ORGANIZATION AND CELEBRATED ALL OF OUR LOYAL SUPPORTERS.
A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

DEAR RMHCJ FAMILY AND FRIENDS,

2015 is an important year for the Ronald McDonald House. Our goal will be to effectively prepare RMH for the expansion from 30 rooms to 54 rooms, and more importantly, the capacity to serve 1,500 families. I compare it to pouring the foundation of a house. It must be solid and level to ensure the house lasts for a very long time. We have a lot of work to do to ensure our vision of the future becomes reality.

In 2014, we served 1,479 families; 974 families in the House and an additional 505 families in hotels. This statistic is the most compelling reason for our expansion: 34% of families were forced to stay in a hotel, where it is extremely difficult to fulfill our mission.

Our vision has been crystallized with a new Strategic Plan that will provide a road map to our success. A small sample of these objectives includes: 1. Increasing the awareness of our programs; 2. enhancing technology, data management and systems that are aligned with a larger House, and 3. deepening our relationships with our medical partners.

It will be especially important to focus our efforts primarily on our mission, which is “To support the health and well-being of children by providing lodging and services for critically ill children and their families.”

Thank you so much to our volunteers, who invested more than 20,000 hours into the Ronald McDonald House in 2014. This level of volunteer engagement is “best in class” compared to other local charities and Ronald McDonald Houses across the country. We could not have done it without you and look forward to seeing you again this year!

Sincerely,

CURT CUNKLE
BOARD PRESIDENT

“A TIME TO BUILD”

AS YOU DRIVE UP TO THE RONALD McDonald House these days, the impact of our expansion project greets you at the front gate. Nothing looks the same. Gone is the serene setting of our beautiful House, replaced by a white perimeter wall with mounds of dirt behind it, heralding the promise of what is to come.

Every time I drive up, my heart skips a beat. I think of the many young families, the names and faces of whom we don’t know yet, but who will come to stay with us in their time of need. I think of the planning and commitment of so many people who have loved our mission and worked so hard to get us to this point. I think of the outpouring of generosity of our community who has supported us. I think it is... “A Time to Build.”

Step inside the Ronald McDonald House and our signs implore you to “Pardon Our Dust.” Nothing looks the same. We are renovating and building inside, just as we are outside. The front desk and administrative offices have all been temporarily reconfigured, and we have lost most of our parking.

But these temporary ‘nuisances’ don’t really bother us, because inside our House an incredible spirit is at work. Everything is the same. We are fully operational, meeting the needs of our families. Our staff and volunteers find the challenges of expansion inspiring. This is only possible because of the exceptional dedication that our staff and volunteers have for our families, our mission, and to our expansion project.

Together with our families, we are excited that we must get through these days of transition to grow to the 54-room Ronald McDonald House we will become. We understand with commitment and grace that it is “A Time to Build”.

Best wishes,

DIANE BOYLE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ONE IMPORTANT MATTTER FOR A FACILITY DOG LIKE MYSELF IS LEARNING NEW SKILLS. RECENTLY, I WORKED ON PERFECTING MY SOCCER TECHNIQUES SO I COULD PLAY WITH THE JACKSONVILLE ARMADA WHEN THEY STOPPED BY FOR A VISIT. MANY OF THE TEAM MEMBERS WERE QUITE IMPRESSED THAT I COULD Dribble THE SOCCER BALL. EVERYONE, BIG AND SMALL, HAD A FUN AFTERNOON IN THE COURTYARD SHOWING OFF THEIR SOCCER MOVES.

It is going to be a very exciting year as I help grow the “House that Love Built.” Stay up-to-date and follow my “Woof Wednesday” post on the RMHCJ Facebook page, or visit our website at rmhcjacksonville.org, and check out my page, “Meet Reed.”

Don’t forget to pick-up one of my signature trading cards and get a high-five when you stop by for a visit.

WOOF, WOOF! 🐶
(Love, Reed)
HEAR, RIDE, AND HEAL
NAKEEM’S STORY

by DONNA PULSE-MURPHY, INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

There are those moments in life when a child touches you in the most remarkable way. This is one of those moments.

Meet Nakeem. As you look into those soulful eyes and that winning smile, you know you’re in for a treat. And it is no wonder that Nakeem, a First Brown Belt in Karate, an honor student, and with friends galore, would capture our hearts! Not to mention that he was born on Valentine’s Day and his name means “God’s Gift.”

Nakeem’s story is one of both anguish and triumph; not only for himself, but for his parents, Natasha and Ronald Blackman. Nakeem was struck with ‘Sudden Onset Bilateral Total Sensorineural Hearing Loss’, a sudden loss of most of his hearing, in first grade. Originally diagnosed with environmental allergies, it took numerous visits to doctors before the Blackmans were directed to seek the help they needed – from an audiologist in Orlando, FL, where they reside.

Relieved to get the care they so desperately needed for their child, there were many uncertainties along the way. But Natasha would say with great resolve, “My son is going to hear again!” Before receiving Cochlear Implants at a hospital in Orlando (which his friends at school found ‘so cool’ because they thought they were Bluetooth in a rainbow of colors), Nakeem taught himself how to lip read. This is extraordinary for a child so young and a testament to Nakeem’s perseverance. In fact, Nakeem received an award from his school in just that – perseverance!

The journey to recovery was difficult. But what brought them all great comfort was their stay at the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Jacksonville during their countless trips to Nemours Children’s Clinic for activation and programming of his Cochlear Implants. Natasha recounted how such strong bonds were formed at RMHC Jacksonville and tears came to her eyes as she recalled the song “Thank You for Being a Friend” sung by a mother and son at one of RMHC Jax’s musical events.

And, as expected, Nakeem made many friends during his stay there.

Another event at the House that really touched Natasha and Ronald was the gathering of families on a Thursday or Friday night to play bingo, and the joy on the children’s faces when they would win a prize. “The one that stands out the most for Ron and me is Nakeem and another little girl winning two games in a row. There were two other children who did not win a prize, so Nakeem and the little girl gave away one of their prizes each to the other two children who did not win. The children hugged Nakeem and the other little girl with such happiness and gratefulness. It was a fond moment for us parents to see how nicely children can get along.”

It’s stories like these that reveal the powerful impact the House has on bringing joy into the lives of the families at this ‘home away from home.’

But what really strikes a chord in my heart is how RMHC Jacksonville provides a safe place, and boundless support from a dedicated staff and volunteers, during this trying time in their lives. “They all took time to listen to Ron and me during our grieving process while we tried to stay strong for Nakeem”, Natasha said. “Although there were times we felt sad, alone, and frustrated, there were other mothers or fathers or both parents with their child going through worse than what we experienced with Nakeem.”

I need to do something to help others who are deaf like me.

As Natasha had said, her son did hear again, almost to his full capacity. Nakeem’s cochlear implants, produced by Medtronic, Inc. – the world’s largest medical technology company – are truly one of life’s little electronic hearing wonders!

But Nakeem’s story doesn’t end there…

This sudden hearing loss, although quite disheartening at times, would be the very thing that would propel Nakeem and his parents to rise above this adversity and go on to help others in need. Nakeem told his parents, “I need to do something to help. I am blessed and I want to help others who are deaf like me.”

So Natasha and Ronald are forming a charity, NDBlackman Charities, to make Nakeem’s dream come true. Their experiences are inspiring them to raise funds for other families in need. They plan to host a bike ride to support Ronald McDonald House Charities of Jacksonville and give the gift of togetherness for other families when they need it most.
Taylor Scheibe, Founder of WithLove Charity, visited the House a few days before Valentine’s Day to spread love and hope to all of the children and families staying in the House. Taylor was joined by WithLove volunteers who prepared dinner for our families before helping out with bingo. Taylor has a special connection to children battling cancer because she has been in their shoes. Diagnosed with Large Cell Lymphoma at age 10, Taylor battled the illness until the age of 12. During that time, she endured numerous surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation, and a bone marrow transplant. In October 2012, she celebrated her 10th anniversary of being cancer-free and created WithLove to celebrate her remission. Taylor and WithLove Charity spread the love to children staying in our House this Valentine’s Day by organizing a toy drive and collecting personal Valentine cards for all of the children. Thank you, Taylor, for your generous spirit and for sharing your love with us! 😊

February was all about sports at the House, and the kids loved it! On February 5, the Jacksonville Armada visited the House to bring some Giants spirit to the kids. Players Jerrod Tucker, Elijah Smith, and Ty Thomas, and Jacksonville Armada dancers Christina Zinn and Cat Lyon played basketball, signed autographs and visited with the kids in the playroom. Mr. Biggs, the Giants’ mascot, joined in the fun and was a big hit with the kids.

The fun continued on February 6 when players from the Jacksonville Armada Football Club came to the House for a joint appearance. Players signed autographs and played soccer with the children in the courtyard. The Jacksonville Armada also provided tickets to all of the families for their inaugural game against the Philadelphia Union on Saturday, February 7, at EverBank Field. Congratulations to the Armada on their first big win! 😊
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Jacksonville is pleased to honor the generosity of Mrs. Mary Virginia Terry and the late Mr. C. Herman Terry by formally naming our Ronald McDonald House facility the Mr. and Mrs. C. Herman Terry Campus.

Not only has our organization benefited from the generous gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Terry, but we also have been fortunate to have their active involvement and leadership. Mr. Terry served as the Chair for the original Capital Campaign for the current House in 1998. Mrs. Terry serves as Honorary Campaign Chair for the current Expansion Campaign and is also a member of our Advisory Board.

“I am happy to be able to help the Ronald McDonald House with their expansion,” said Mrs. Terry. “It doesn’t seem that long ago when my late husband led the campaign to build the present house. The Ronald McDonald House was very important to Herman, just as it is to me. I hope others in our community will be inspired to help care for the families who stay there. Their generosity will make a big difference in helping the House grow to serve all those in need.”

Mrs. Terry’s generosity and support of our expansion and renovation project will allow us to meet the increasing demand of families who need our program. Her gift has already inspired others in the community to be a part of this monumental time at the House. We are proud to recognize the Terrys for their long-lasting dedication and support for more than 26 years. We extend our sincere love and appreciation to Mrs. Terry for continuing her and her late husband’s legacy of giving and “Growing the House That Love Built.”
AN EVENING IN THE
Garden
2015 McGALA
Saturday, May 30th

Celebrate The House That Love Built with “An Evening in the Garden” at the 21st annual McGala! Come join us for an enchanted event at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort and Spa. This year continues to celebrate “Growing The House That Love Built,” highlighting our expansion and the addition of a magnificent Rooftop Healing Garden. The garden will provide a space of quiet respite and tranquility for parents and children, and will be one of the new spaces created as a part of our expansion and renovation. Our “An Evening in the Garden” McGala will include a cocktail reception, silent auction, dinner, dancing, and live music from Hot Property. Guests will be surrounded by bright colors, fun patterns, and gorgeous flowers! To learn more, preview auction items, or purchase tickets, please visit our website:

RMHCJACKSONVILLE.ORG/MCGALA

LICENSE & TAG RENEWAL

Florida residents can donate to Ronald McDonald House Charities of Jacksonville when they renew their vehicle tags and driver’s licenses. You can select our organization when you renew online or by mail. Adding $1 or any other amount when you renew will help our local chapter in addition to supporting Ronald McDonald Houses around the state of Florida!
WISH LIST

Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Jacksonville needs many of the same items you use in your own home (and lots more of them) to successfully operate its Ronald McDonald House® and Ronald McDonald Family Room® programs. The items needed most are:

**FOOD**
- Individually packaged cereal, chips, cookies, fruit, soups and meals
- Breakfast bars and toaster pastries
- Coffee creamer
- White vinegar
- Individually packaged soups & meals

**OFFICE SUPPLIES**
- 8.5 x 11” copy paper
- 1/3 cut manila file folders
- Hanging file folders
- Legal size writing pads
- Post-It notes

**GIFT CARDS**
- Gas
- Walmart & Sam’s Club
- Home Depot & Lowe’s
- Target
- CVS & Walgreens
- Publix & Winn-Dixie

**HOUSEHOLD**
- Flashlights
- Bleach & detergent
- Lysol disinfecting spray
- Swiffer Dusters
- Swiffer Sweeper dry cloths
- Magic Erasers

**KITCHEN**
- Paper towels
- Paper cups, bowls, and plates
- Large plastic containers with lids
- Plastic forks, knives, and spoons

**MISCELLANEOUS**
- Garden hose sprayers
- Area attraction tickets

Please call **904.807.HOME(4663)** to schedule the delivery of your donation. Don’t forget to save your pop tabs too!

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