Heart Strings News

Keeping Families Close®

40 years 1985 - 2025

RMHC® Ann Arbor

Spring/Summer 2026

MEET THE PIPER FAMILY

Erika and Aaron Piper of Westland came to Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor in April 2025 after their newborn daughter, Liliana, developed serious heart complications. While caring for Liliana, the family, including 2½-year-old sister Lucia, waited nearly six weeks for a room at the House. When they finally received the call, Erika says, "A weight had been lifted."

Liliana was critically ill and suffered cardiac arrest. When every second mattered, being 40 minutes away was not an option. Staying at the House allowed Erika and Aaron to rush across the street and be at Liliana's bedside within minutes.

"The House removed every challenge of access to Liliana's care," Erika says. "We could just be there for her."

During the Piper family's 251-night stay, the House became something even more enduring: a community. Within its walls, they met other families walking similar paths, whose children were also fighting complex medical battles. These bonds formed quickly through small moments in the kitchen and quiet conversations. "We would share our fears and our victories," Erika says. "Their victories felt like our own. We were rooting for every family."

When the Pipers returned home, they did not leave those relationships behind. The friendships remain—a lifelong support system forged in crisis and strengthened by compassion.

The Piper family's story is a powerful reminder of what staying at the House truly means to families in crisis. After weeks of waiting, finally receiving a room gave them comfort, stability, and precious time close to Liliana when every second mattered. It also surrounded them with a community of support during the hardest days of their lives.

"When your child is that critical, you simply need to be close," Erika says. "The House made that possible. And that changed everything."

IN THIS ISSUE

2 Letter from our CEO
3 House Happenings
4 Meals Matter Program
4 Volunteer Spotlight
5 Board Member Spotlight
5 Become a Corporate Partner
6,7 Red Shoe Affair Recap

Scan to donate and support more families like the Pipers today!

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A LETTER FROM OUR CEO

Kim Kelly, CEO

Serving More Families, Better

As we continue our mission of keeping families close during some of life's hardest moments, we are always asking ourselves an important question: How can we serve more families, better?

Every family that walks through the doors of Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor has different needs, but all are seeking the same thing—comfort, support, and the ability to focus fully on their hospitalized child's healing. That is why we are continually evolving our programs and spaces to better meet families' needs.

Over the past year, we have made thoughtful updates to create greater connection, comfort, and care:

- Transformed a portion of the living room into a casual family gathering space with a glass-enclosed playroom so parents can relax and connect while keeping an eye on their children.
- Reimagined an extension of our game room into a wellness space with cardio equipment, weights, yoga area, and added two soundproof pods for parents needing a quiet space to work.
- Expanded our Hospitality Cart program at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital from one cart to two, allowing us to reach thousands more families with comfort items.
- Served dinner to families 365 days a year and expanded our meal service to include lunch five days a week.

While we continue working toward solutions that allow us to welcome more families to the House and reduce wait times, we are equally committed to finding new ways to support every family that needs us. One way we do this is by providing hotel rooms to families while they wait for a room at the House. Whether inside the House or within the hospital, our goal remains the same: to provide a true home-away-from-home so families can focus on what matters most—their child.

Thank you for making this work possible. Your support allows us to continue growing, adapting, and serving families better every day.

Kim Kelly
CEO, Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor

HOUSE HAPPENINGS

Bringing comfort, connection, and care to families

Mini Golf

A group from AccumTech hosted a mini golf event for our families. The nine-hole course went through various rooms in the House, and the volunteers from AccumTech served as caddies, helping the families by providing strategic advice and even teaching some golf lingo. Our families enjoyed gift card prizes and shared many laughs and smiles!

Magician

It's a magical night at the House when the magician visits! Families were treated to card and coin tricks as well as balloon artistry.

Arts & Crafts

Family members of all ages enjoy our Arts & Crafts nights. These hands-on crafting evenings are a great way to relieve stress and find small moments of joy and calm.

Fawn, the Therapy Dog

Fawn, one of the therapy dogs from Paws4Patients at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, visited the House to spread some cheer and furry love to our families. Fawn loves the attention and always puts a smile on the faces of everyone in the House!

Glam Night

A GLAMourous night was had during our Glam Night hosted by the University of Michigan Chapter of Simply From the Heart. Families were invited to step away from the stress of hospital visits and long days to enjoy time together at stations featuring hair styling, nail painting, and crafts. It was a chance to pause, connect, and experience a bit of normalcy. Volunteers also provided makeup and self-care items for families to keep.

If you would like to contribute your time and/or talent to support our family activities, please contact Mary Moffett at mmoffett@rmhcannarbor.org

#KeepingFamiliesClose

RMHC® Ann Arbor

MEALS MATTER PROGRAM

Feeding More Families

Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor is committed to providing a home-cooked meal every night to the families staying with us. We have also started to provide lunch five days a week.

To meet this important goal, we need the support of our entire community—and that's where YOU come in. Sign up to cook a meal at our House with your family, friends, coworkers, or club. Your time and care will help families feel the warmth and comfort of a home-cooked meal when they need it most.

Scan to learn more about Meals Matter

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Angie Zacharias

We are proud to recognize Angie Zacharias for her dedication to Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor. Angie's connection to the mission is deeply personal—after staying in the hospital with her daughter in 2019, a visit from the Hospitality Cart left a lasting impact on her, inspiring her to give back.

Now, Angie volunteers weekly at Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor, helping at the Main House and on the Hospitality Cart at the hospital. She loves being able to offer comfort, kindness, and a smile to families during difficult times. Some of her favorite memories include participating in the Little Victors Wave and receiving a heartfelt thanks from a grateful family member, moments that remind her of the difference she's making.

We are so thankful for Angie's compassion and commitment to supporting families at Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor!

To learn how you can become a volunteer, contact Katie McKiernan at kmckiernan@rmhcannarbor.org or scan the QR code.

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

JZ Zdanowski

JZ and his wife, Terry at Forks & Corks

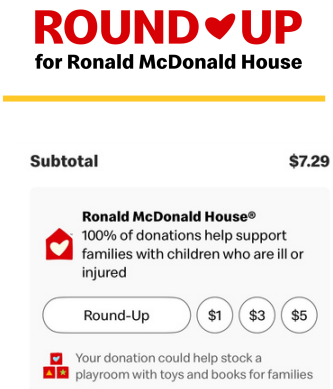
For the past 11 years, JZ Zdanowski has been a dedicated leader and champion of Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor. As Board President for four years, he helped guide the organization through the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by two years serving as Past President.

His leadership has extended across nearly every corner of the organization, including six years on the Finance Committee, two years as Governance Committee Chair, and two years as Expansion Committee Co-Chair. JZ and his wife, Terry, are also entering their fourth year as Co-Chairs of Forks & Corks, helping grow one of our most popular events. Some of JZ's fondest memories have been cooking dinner for our families and grilling for our dads on Father's Day.

Outside of his service to Ronald McDonald House, JZ is a Partner and Co-Founder of Three Oaks Communities, the first private developer in the United States to build neuro-inclusive neighborhoods for both neurotypical homebuyers and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, promoting greater independence, dignity, and community integration for all residents. In addition, JZ has been recognized by the cities of Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids for various real estate historic preservation projects. Prior to his work in real estate, JZ spent 11 years at Microsoft leading major business units and strategic initiatives.

Did you know?

You can support families at Ronald McDonald House just by rounding up your order at McDonald's. Thanks to our amazing local communities, more than $125,476 has already been raised this year through Round-Up donations! This summer, those spare cents are helping bring comfort and joy to siblings staying at the House. Next time you visit McDonald's, be sure to Round-Up at the drive-thru, kiosk, front counter, or in the app — every cent makes a difference!



Round-Up in the McDonald's app!

Become a Corporate Partner

Discover ways to support Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor through a corporate gift while your employees engage in fulfilling activities with mission-driven purposes.

As part of our Corporate Champion Program, we will meet with you to discuss your company's community engagement goals.
Together, we can craft a personalized corporate plan that specifically targets your goals while making a substantial impact on the lives of the families we serve.

WAYS TO ENGAGE:

- Cook a meal
- Sponsor/attend an event
- Host a wish list drive
- Lead a family activity
- Collect pop tabs

For more details, scan the code:

Join a dynamic group of young professionals - check out the Red Shoe Crew at Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor!

Red Shoe Affair

Thank you to everyone who made our 14th Annual Red Shoe Affair an unforgettable evening. Because of your incredible generosity, we raised over $708,000 to provide comfort, care, and a home-away-from-home for families at Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor.

Save the Date - Red Shoe Affair - 2027
Saturday, April 24, 2027 at Saint John's Resort, Plymouth, MI

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Red Shoe Affair

A special thanks to our ambassador family - the Temple Family, donors, sponsors, guests, auction bidders, board members, Event Chair - Leyla Conlan, Honorary Co-Chairs - Sheri Belcher & Todd Tribble, host committee members, volunteers, and staff.

Watch The Temple Family Story on our YouTube Channel.

Ronald McDonald House Charities®
Ann Arbor

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RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE ANN ARBOR MISSION

We provide essential services that remove barriers, strengthen families, and promote healing when children need healthcare.

SUPPORT OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

9.13.26 - Home Run for the House

This family-friendly event is an opportunity for you to join with past families and the community to "hit a home run" for the House.

10.18.26 - Rally for the House

Join us at Wolverine Pickleball for a fun-filled day of pickleball, laughter, and community spirit—all while supporting families in need!

11.7.26 - Battle for the Houses

Battle for the Houses is a friendly competition to grow awareness and raise funds for Ronald McDonald House Ann Arbor. Last Year's Battle raised over $150,000 for the Ann Arbor and Mid-Michigan (Lansing) chapters!

11.13.26 - Forks & Corks

This special evening, at Barton Hills Country Club, features a four-course food and wine pairing woven together with mission-rich moments impacting the funding and expansion of our Meals Matter program.

4.24.27 - 15th Annual Red Shoe Affair