



The Ronald McDonald House of Albany

By Jenna Caputo

The idea for the first Ronald McDonald House started in Philadelphia in 1974. Eagles football player Fred Hill's daughter was being treated for leukemia at three years old. The Hill family went through three years of treatment, often camping out at the hospital on chairs and benches, eating "meals" out of vending machines. They were surrounded by other parents in the same situation since many families traveled far for the treatment and couldn't afford hotel rooms. Fred went to his teammates and together they raised funds to offer their support to the head of the pediatric oncology unit at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who had always dreamed of a comfortable temporary residence for the families of the children being treated there. Jim Murray, the Eagles' general manager, enlisted help from the local McDonald's advertising agency who pulled the strings needed to bring the franchise in on the fundraising. Finally, enough was raised to purchase an old house near the hospital.

By 1979, ten more houses opened, and today, there are more than 377 Ronald McDonald House programs operating in 45 countries and regions around the world, providing comfort and support to more than 10 million families over the years.

The Albany Ronald McDonald House started in 1979 when Dr. William Cromie came to Albany Medical Center as head of Pediatric Urology after previously serving at the Philadelphia Children's Hospital. After witnessing the process in Philadelphia, Cromie gathered volunteers to make the same thing happen for Albany Medical Center. Hundreds of volunteers worked endless hours to make the dream of an Albany Ronald McDonald House finally become a reality when they opened the doors on the 35th Ronald McDonald House on June 30, 1982. Five years later they opened a second house to meet the overwhelming need, and over the course of two years, the two houses were turned into one. By June of 1989, the newly renovated house now had 16 bedrooms available for families in need. By their tenth anniversary, the House had served more than 5,000 guests.

In 1996, the local Ronald McDonald House and Ronald McDonald Children's Charities merged to form RMHC of the Capital Region to expand their program even further, and in 2000, they opened the Ronald McDonald Family Room inside the children's hospital at Albany Medical Center to bring some of the comforts of the House directly to families in the hospital. Over the years, they have continued their services, providing dental care, a third house, a mobile a la Carte program within the hospital, and other programs to meet the needs of children and their families. Today, more than 20,000 families have called the

Albany Ronald McDonald House "home," and even more families have benefited from their other services throughout the years.

On June 30th, the Albany house celebrated their 40th anniversary with their "40 Years of Love" Gala at the Albany Capital Center, which featured CBS6 News Anchor Liz Bishop, and B95.5 Program Director Chad O'Hara as masters of ceremonies, hosting an evening of heartwarming stories from families served by RMHC-CR over the years, a distinguished services awards presentation, live and silent auctions, and gourmet cuisine and open bar by Mazzone Hospitality. They will be hosting another event in September—the Holding Hands, Holding Hearts sunset dinner cruise in Lake George.

For more information about RMHC services, events, and opportunities to help, please visit rmhcofalbany.org.