

Families Benefit from Community Caring at Ronald McDonald House

Walk into the Ronald McDonald House at 825 SW Buchanan Street, and you immediately feel safe and comforted—just like home. That’s exactly the idea behind the large, beautifully renovated house that provides a place to live for families of children receiving medical care in Topeka.

“A typical month can range from 25 people to 60 people. We’ll have families who are long-term and families who leave after a week,” said Martha Hagedorn-Krass, CEO of Ronald McDonald House Charities in Northeast Kansas. “We never know what a given month will look like.”

The house can hold up to 24 or 25 people at a time, people who are referred to them by medical professionals in the community. Most who stay are parents of premature infants.

“Ronald McDonald Houses around the world serve the population that the local medical community serves. In Topeka, that’s the neonatal intensive care services,” said Hagedorn-Krass.

The Topeka Ronald McDonald House was founded in 1986 by a consortium including the Junior League, local McDonald’s owners, the Shawnee County Medical Society and other community leaders. In that first year, they launched a significant fundraising campaign and raised around \$1.5 million dollars. Since then, they’ve always had a tight relationship with the community.

“The support generated by the community was heartfelt and strong,” said Hagedorn-Krass. “We

don’t charge a fee, so that allows any family to stay here. About 75% of our families are low- to moderate-income, which means much of our population can’t afford to make a donation. We look for support largely in fundraisers, grants and direct donations from the community-at-large.”

This year, they are beginning a capital improvement campaign to upgrade the house’s mechanical, fire and security systems, as well as trying to raise enough to do masonry work on the outside of the building.

“We’ve been successful with foundations around Topeka to help raise the first \$55,000 of our \$350,000 campaign,” said Hagedorn-Krass. “By going back to early supporters of that first campaign 26 years ago, we’ve found our friends are still there and interested in supporting us.”

In addition, the Ronald McDonald House holds two major fundraisers. One, held last year for the first time, is the Run for Ronald 5K, which attracted 350 people to help raise money. They’ll be holding the event again later this month, on Saturday, April 30, at Lake Shawnee; they’re taking registrations and pledges online at www.rmhctopeka.org/runforronald.

Another of their major fundraisers is the Denim to Diamonds event, being held this year on Saturday, August 20. The event attracts 300 people each year through corporate tables

and ticket sales for the dinner with music and auction items. They are currently soliciting sponsors for the event, and interested businesses can find more information at www.rmhctopeka.org/fundraiser.htm.

“The Ronald McDonald House has its roots in basic, strong community support,”



Martha Hagedorn-Krass, CEO/executive director, Ronald McDonald House Charities

said Hagedorn-Krass. “What we have found to be extremely significant is the volunteerism in the community. We have 1000 volunteers helping around the house, making meals and helping at events. Many of these relationships are longstanding, especially with the various organizations we work with.”

Hagedorn-Krass said they try to get organizations and businesses involved on a monthly or bi-weekly schedule to help make meals for the families. Most are reheatable since the families tend to spend the majority of their time at the hospital with their children.

“It’s good for them to be able to come in late, stick a casserole in the microwave, and have a glass of milk and a salad,” said Hagedorn-Krass.

For more information on the Ronald McDonald House, including how your business can sponsor events or volunteer, call 785.235.6852 or visit www.rmhctopeka.org.

*A Chamber member firm will be featured in **Topeka Business** each month. Company names will be drawn quarterly by the membership department from the labels prepared for the Chamber Power Breakfast. Chamber communications specialist Andrew Davis writes the company profiles.*

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