



Ronald McDonald House of Scranton executive director Richard Bradshaw, left, gathers with longtime board member Elaine Shepard and house founder Dr. Mel Wolk on a recent morning at the house. Since 1986, the house has provided temporary shelter to families with sick children.

Where the heart dwells

Ronald McDonald House, U of S club to host talk

The Ronald McDonald House of Scranton and the Show Your Stripes Club at University of Scranton will host the Building a Winning Culture event featuring former Baltimore Colts defensive lineman Joe Ehrmann and former Philadelphia Eagles General Manager Jim Murray on Wednesday, March 30, at 6 p.m. at the university's John Long Center. Mr. Ehrmann co-founded the Ronald McDonald House of Baltimore, and Mr. Murray co-founded the Ronald McDonald House of Philadelphia.

At the event, the speakers will talk about the importance of service and community involvement and fostering a positive sports culture. There also will be performances by dance teams and a capella groups from the university, as well as a bake sale and raffles.

Admission is free. To RSVP, visit <https://sites.google.com/site/rmhbcw/>. For more information, email rmhstudents@gmail.com.

Ronald McDonald House of Scranton marks 30 years serving families of sick kids with April 3 Gourmet Gala fundraiser

BY JOSH McAULIFFE

STAFF WRITER

The first thing Richard Bradshaw tells people when they enter his longtime place of employment is to take off their shoes, put up their feet and relax.

In other words, make yourself at home.

That, in a nutshell, has been the mission of the Ronald McDonald House of Scranton since its doors opened June 25, 1986.

The house, located at 332 Wheeler Ave., just down the street from Geisinger Community Medical Center, provides a “home away from home” for families of seriously ill or injured children at local hospitals free of charge. It’s one of more than 300 Ronald McDonald Houses throughout the world.

With the addition of its family rooms at GCMC, Moses Taylor Hospital and Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, the “Ronald House,” as Mr. Bradshaw affectionately refers to it, now serves more families than ever as it approaches its 30th anniversary.



BUTCH COMEGYS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The house is located down the street from Geisinger Community Medical Center. It has undergone a number of renovations through the years.

2015 by the numbers

1,347 Overnight stays

10 days Average length of stay

1,000 Meals served

7,000 Volunteer service hours

10,149 Visits to Ronald McDonald House Family Rooms serving the neonatal intensive care and pediatric units at Moses Taylor Hospital and Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center



BUTCH COMEGYS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dingman Twp. resident and recent Ronald McDonald House of Scranton guest Tonia Smale holds her infant daughter, Isabella Eve Lorenzo.

environment away from the

Donations and fundraising fuels the house's existence, and on Sunday, April 3, it will hold its annual Gourmet Gala at Mohegan Sun Pocono in Plains Twp.

With those funds, along with a dedicated staff, board and volunteer network, the house can provide families with a little bit of normalcy during an extremely abnormal situation.

"To watch it grow into what it is today has been very exciting," said Mr. Bradshaw, the house's executive director since 2000. "What we do is all about compassion. It's compassion for the families, it's compassion for the kids. There is nothing more heartbreaking than seeing a mom and dad not knowing what to do next. This

125 Overnight stays at Gelsinger Community Medical Center's pediatric unit Ronald McDonald House Family Room

How to help

The Ronald McDonald House of Scranton is located at 332 Wheeler Ave. For information on donating or volunteering, visit rmhscranton.org or call 570-969-8998.

takes as much stress out of the equation as possible."

Philadelphia start

The first Ronald McDonald House was established in Philadelphia in 1974 by NFL player Fred Hill, who recognized the need for a safe, supportive

hospital for families when his daughter was being treated for leukemia. With the help of McDonald's restaurants in the Philly area and his Philadelphia Eagles teammates, Mr. Hill raised the funds needed to purchase the house.

The Ronald McDonald House network had spread to many other cities when, in 1984, local pediatrician Mel Wolk decided it was time for Scranton to have its own.

"I'm sitting on my porch on a summer day, and I turned to my wife and said, 'What if we had a Ronald McDonald House here?'" Dr. Wolk said. "With the neonatal (intensive care) unit at CMC, I thought it'd be good to have one here, like the one in Philly."

*Please see **McDONALD**, Page F4*

McDONALD: Events planned to celebrate 30th anniversary

FROM PAGE F1

With that, Dr. Wolk approached the administration at CMC, where he was the then-head of pediatrics, as well as local McDonald's franchisees Albert and Carol Mueller. The Muellers, who had been involved in establishing the Danville Ronald McDonald House, made the initial \$25,000 donation. CMC purchased the 2,430-square-foot, three-story house, the 92nd in the Ronald McDonald system, and leased it to the nonprofit Northeastern Pennsylvania Children's House Inc.

Since June 1986, the house has never closed.

"It just flew," said Dr. Wolk, the house's first board president and now an honorary board member. "And it's just flown beautifully over the years because people keep it flying. And a lot of that is due to Rich Bradshaw."

Mr. Bradshaw's introduction to the Ronald McDonald House was at age 7, when he stayed at the Philly house following a surgery.

"For years, I always remembered what took place and the compassion that was shown to me and my family," he said.

At 18, Mr. Bradshaw started volunteering for the Scranton house as a way to give back.

He figured he'd do it for a couple of years and then move on. But the house simply got in his bones and became an essential part of his life, he said.

In 2000, he was hired as executive director. Since then, the house has gotten an addition and can now accommodate up to eight families. Cozy and welcoming, it has all the usual features of a residence — parlor, dining room, kitchen, playroom and yard for the kids. Each bedroom has its own private bathroom.

Even when the house is filled, it can put up additional families at local hotels it has relationships with, Mr. Bradshaw said. One time, he said, it had 17 families in hotels.

The house strives to provide a taste of home for fami-



SUNDAY TIMES FILE PHOTO

Ronald McDonald welcomes visitors to the Ronald McDonald House of Scranton during a fundraiser in 2006. One of the house's most popular fundraising events is the annual Gourmet Gala, which will be held Sunday, April 3, at Mohegan Sun Pocono, Plains Twp.

lies, where they can lounge on the sofa, watch TV and eat a meal prepared by a volunteer.

Every Thanksgiving, Mr. Bradshaw and his family prepare Thanksgiving dinner for those staying at the house. After dinner, they retire to the house's conference room and watch Christmas specials on the room's projector TV.

Bridget Slagan, the house's family room coordinator, said one recent image particularly stands out to her — a little girl riding her scooter through the house, just as she would at her own home.

"I love it. Getting to meet the families and seeing them through, I really enjoy what I do," Mrs. Slagan said. "I feel like I'm making a difference in the world."

A lot of families stay in touch with Mr. Bradshaw, which is not surprising when you consider he and the house's staff and volunteers are there with them during such a tough, vulnerable period. Mr. Bradshaw vividly remembers a man who was in the Marines weeping over the plight of his child.

"It's not often where you see grown men crying," he



BUTCH COMEGYS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Ronald McDonald House of Scranton volunteer Kellia Giambrone started the Show Your Stripes Club at University of Scranton as a way to get students more involved in the house's mission.

said. "I don't know how many times I've come home and not being able to get a family out of my mind. ... It's a blessing being able to share what I get to share with these families, those moments where you get to offer some strength and some hope."

Recent guest

Tonia Smale, of Dingman Twp., Pike County, recently stayed at the house for about a month as her newborn, Isabella Eve Lorenzo, learned to suck, swallow and breathe

after being born six weeks premature on Dec. 29.

"She needed to catch up. ... That was her big developmental thing," Ms. Smale said. "I was like a nervous wreck. She would stop breathing at certain intervals, her heart beat would drop. We needed to learn how to react to that."

Being able to come back to the house after such physically, emotionally and mentally draining days at the hospital was hugely beneficial, Ms. Smale said.

"It kept us healthy. It kept us safe," said Ms. Smale, a Type II diabetic who needed her own time to recover following an emergency C-section.

After leaving the hospital, Isabella came down with more complications, including regular vomiting. After a couple of scary weeks, doctors determined the issue to be her pyloric valve. Now, Isabella is healthy and content.

During that period, Ms. Smale stayed at the Danville Ronald McDonald House while Isabella was being treated. She said it was interesting to see how the two houses provided "the same level of comfort."

The family rooms at Moses Taylor, GCMC and Geisinger Wyoming Valley, complete with hospitality carts and play areas, have added another critical component to the mission, Mr. Bradshaw said.

He knows this because he has experienced their value firsthand. A few years ago, his wife gave birth to twins and experienced complications that threatened her life.

Being in the family room at Moses Taylor with other people going through similar experiences helped him keep his bearings. He and the other fathers watched Monday Night Football, ate pizza and "offered support to each other."

"It was a beautiful experience," he said. "It was the first ray of hope I had in that whole experience. And it was a place where my children could come and stay with me."

Varied volunteers

Volunteers also are a huge part of the Ronald McDonald House equation.

They range from Wendy Jones, who cleans, does laundry and buys groceries for the house, to longtime board member Elaine Shepard, one of the planners of the Gourmet Gala since the beginning.

When Mrs. Shepard's son was a child, he was hit in the eye with a rock and was admitted at CMC. At that time, though, "there was no place for me," she said.

"I was just so thrilled they finally had a place for parents, even just a place where they could have a break," Mrs. Shepard said. "I think it's just wonderful. ... And the community has been wonderful in supporting it."

Kellia Giambrone's passion for the cause stemmed from the fact that her parents stayed at the Danville house when her baby brother was awaiting a liver transplant.

Tragically, her brother ultimately passed away. But her parents never forgot the way they were treated at the house.

"They said they were the most hospitable, nice people. It was just a nice escape to have," Ms. Giambrone said.

About three years ago, Ms. Giambrone started volunteering at the Scranton house while an undergraduate at the University of Scranton. In time, she got other students involved, and eventually founded the campus' Show Your Stripes Club, which is dedicated to promoting awareness of the house and giving students volunteer opportunities.

"To this day, I honor my brother's memory," said Ms. Giambrone, who is now putting her work at the house toward her master's degree in health administration at the university.

In addition to the Gourmet Gala, the Scranton Ronald House has other annual fundraising ventures, including the Show Your Stripes 5K Race and Fun Walk. And there's the reunion cookouts, where former guests, staff and volunteers can come together in a fun setting. Dr. Wolk is always among those working the grill.

Speaking of fun, Mr. Bradshaw said several major events are in the works for the house's 30th anniversary. Certainly, there's much to celebrate, and many more good works yet to come.

"It's a life of service," Mr. Bradshaw said. "You don't get into this industry if you don't want to serve people."

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