



Aloha

# From Our House to Yours



February 2008

Newsletter of Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Hawaii

## One Family's Story

Life took an unexpected detour for Dee and Kelsey Walker on April 26, 2007, when Dee was flown from the Big Island to Oahu on doctor's orders to be monitored and cared for by Kapiolani Medical Center. She was only 24-weeks along in her pregnancy and her doctor said there were complications.

Twelve hours after arriving at the hospital, Dee gave birth to a 17-1/2 ounce daughter whom they named Kiya-Leshay. They were elated to finally have a baby girl to go along with their two sons, K-Jaye and Tre, but they immediately began to anticipate the roller coaster ride they were in for. Here is their story in Dee's own words.

### *"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life"* by Dee Walker

We kept asking ourselves how and why this could have happened to us. Was it something I did? How will we manage being on a different island? What about our jobs? The questions just kept emerging, and even though we knew deep down inside that we would do anything, and I mean ANYTHING to hold on to our baby's life, we just didn't know where to begin. Doctors told us that some babies go home by their original due dates at the least, which meant three to four months for us.

The biggest question then was where we would stay for that amount of time? Before I was discharged, one of the hospital's social workers told us about the Ronald McDonald House. Even though we were unsure of what it would be like living there and felt emotionally drained, we decided to give it a try.

From the moment we arrived at the House, there was an instant warm and welcoming feeling. It wasn't anything we expected. We were in complete awe as we were given a tour of

the beautiful home, and an immediate sense of satisfaction came over us. We knew our two boys would love it, too. Who could ask for more? An indoor children's play area, as well as



Dee and Kelsey Walker with sons Tre and K-Jaye at the bedside of Kiya-Leshay

an outdoor play area, which combined, seemed like an ideal daycare set up. The kitchen, dining area, bath-rooms, and bedrooms were all so beautiful, it couldn't have been a more

inviting environment. But it wasn't just the physical atmosphere that made us love the Ronald McDonald House. More than that, it was the people and the organization itself!

We had heard of Ronald McDonald House but until we stayed there, we had no idea of how important it is or how meaningful it would be to us. While staying at the House, we established lifetime friendships with people from all over the globe. Some of the families we met were going through similar situations, if not more challenging ones than we were and we gained strength from them. We supported each other and just knowing that we were not the only ones going through tough times really meant a lot.

Kiya-Leshay fought as hard as she could for eight weeks but unfortunately her little heart and lungs combined could not endure any more, and she passed away at the end of June. It was devastating. But now, as we reflect back, we realize those two months were the best two months of our lives, and that her short visit to this world changed us forever.

The whole experience at the Ronald McDonald House, and knowing the caring volunteers and staff there, has left our two young children with a clearer understanding of many virtues which we value dearly. They have learned to be more accepting of each other's differences; to treat others with kindness and

### Wish List

#### Gift Certificates

- Wal-Mart
- Costco
- K-Mart
- Sam's Club
- Longs Drugs
- Safeway
- Gasoline gift cards

#### Household Items

- Laundry detergent
- Fabric softener/Dryer Sheets
- Paper towels, napkins & plates
- Toilet paper (individually wrapped)
- Zip lock bags-all sizes
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic food storage containers

#### Food Items

- Miscellaneous canned goods
- Shoyu
- Flour
- Cooking oil
- Individually wrapped snacks
- Rice
- Saimin



The Walkers outside their home-away-from-home, the Ronald McDonald House

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Jerri Chong

# A Message from our Executive Director

Cancer and other serious diseases don't take holidays off, so you will always find families staying at the Ronald McDonald House—whether it is Easter, Thanksgiving, a child's birthday, even Christmas.

Given a choice, the children and their families would obviously prefer

to be in their own homes celebrating the occasions with each other and extended family members, rather than on another island, dealing with a child's life-threatening illness.

Thankfully, we live in a culture here in Hawaii where kindness and generosity are the accepted norm. This aloha we show for others is one of the reasons our beautiful islands are so very special.

Each year in December, numerous people and businesses in the community step forward to make sure that guests staying at the House don't miss out on any of the Christmas spirit of caring and giving. Heartwarming examples include groups from local companies foregoing their office Christmas parties to instead create much-appreciated events for our families; individuals dropping off items from our wish list, baking goodies; donating balloons; and much more.

Those with the resources often find the end of the year the right time to make financial contributions to RMHC-HI as well.

One event that is fast becoming a yearly tradition is the RMHC-HI Gala. This year's was the biggest yet with

700 people attending the event honoring the Sullivan family. Starting with the late Maurice ("Sully") Sullivan and continuing to this day with his wife Joanna and their children, these remarkable people have contributed in every way possible to help children and families through Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii. You won't find a more community-minded family anywhere.

Many friends of the Sullivans and supporters of RMHC-HI attended, including former governors and business leaders, as well as several extraordinary families that had stayed at the House previously and came back especially to attend the event (see page six).

Remarkably, families that stay at the House tend to remain part of the RMHC-HI Ohana indefinitely. It is so wonderful to see them when they inevitably return to visit. As you look through this issue, I'm certain you will get a sense of how special the relationships with the families are.

Thank you to every single person who has shown support for Hawaii's Ronald McDonald House, whether you dropped your change into a collection canister at McDonald's, donated goods and services, made monetary donations, or gave of your precious time to serve as a volunteer.

Your continuing kokua can assure that families with a child going through a medical crisis have a home-away-from-home to call their own while seeking treatment in Honolulu.

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Kelsey and Dee returned recently for the RMHC-HI Gala. Dee readily shared their story with the audience.

respect; and they are more aware of what it's like to be a sensitive and caring individual as a whole. These are all essential qualities that we can only hope our children will continue to find of great importance in life.

My belief has always been that there is always something to be thankful for, and even in this bittersweet situation, we will always remember and cherish this heartfelt experience. It has definitely given us a richer perspective on life. We have learned and we have grown. It is Kiya-Leshay's legacy, I guess you could say.

One of my favorite quotes is from Melody Beattie:

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

Ronald McDonald House definitely holds a special place in our hearts! You will always be appreciated whole-heartedly for the priceless gift of love you provided us with at your House, OUR HOME-AWAY-FROM-HOME!

# Parting ways is always difficult...

*"This journey is a huge challenge in my life. But there is hope out there. Just always believe in God," -Rica Ada, 13*



*(Back, l-r) Rica's stepmom Carrie; sister Renee; Rica; dad Juan Sr.; and mom Paula (Front, l-r) Rica's sister Reiaann and brother Juan Jr.*



*RMHC-HI staff members Gene, Candace, Jerri, and Michelle show off their Friendship Bracelets that cancer patient Rica Ada (center) made for them before leaving for home in Saipan after her long stay at the Ronald McDonald House. Right, is the note she attached to each one.*

## Strands & Knots of Friendship

2 strands to remind you of how much you are loved.  
 Another 2 to remember the good Lord above.  
 1 knot to remind you to take care of yourself, and another 1 to remind you to cherish your health.  
 A third 1 to remember to laugh, dance and sing, and the last 1 to remind you of the joy that you bring.

Words cannot explain how much I appreciate everything you have done for me, so I leave this little token of friendship as a reminder of me.

Thank you! Rica H. Ada

# ...but many families find their way back

Kalei and Darcy Baker of Volcano recently dropped by to visit the place they called home in March while their baby Kaiwi'ula was treated for a rare strain of Whooping Cough. "It was quite a shock when we took Kaiwi'ula to the ER and they told us he had to be sent immediately to Oahu by air ambulance, said Darcy."

"But you folks were there for us and we're so grateful, Kalei added. "We just had to come back to thank you. We really wanted to do that. It's so amazing; you can just feel the warmth here."

As many people do, Kalei and Darcy brought others in their family to see the House and meet the people. Here, in a photo taken during their visit, they pose with five of seven children, (back, left-right) Makaloa (15), Ka'ai (10), and Kamaka (13). 'Alohikea sits on Darcy's lap while a now healthy Kaiwi'ula sits on Kalei's. Their two other children, Georgia Lee (9) and Madison (7) were back home on the Big Island.



----- Please clip and mail to RMHC, P.O. Box 61777, Honolulu, Hawaii 96839-1777 -----

I want to step forward for the families. Enclosed is my gift to Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii.

- ♡ \$250    ♡ \$150    ♡ \$100
- ♡ \$75    ♡ \$50    ♡ Other - \$\_\_\_\_\_

♡ My check/payment is enclosed

Please Charge my:

- ♡ Visa    ♡ MasterCard    ♡ American Express

Please Print

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_

♡ Skip my acknowledgement and save the funds for your programs. I know my gift is appreciated and being utilized well. My cancelled check/credit card statement will serve as a receipt (all gifts of \$250 or more will be sent a written receipt in compliance with current tax requirements).

# ♥♥ A Celebration of Life ♥♥

## Hilo event reunites Ronald McDonald House with former guest families



Nearly one hundred people assembled at Nani Mau Botanical Gardens, in Hilo on November 3rd for a reunion of mainly East Hawaii families that had stayed at the Ronald McDonald House sometime during its two-decade history. Some families came from as far away as Kona and Honokaa to take part in the day of fun, food and fellowship — A Celebration of Life.



The event was to help commemorate the Hawaii Ronald McDonald House's 20th anniversary, and to reaffirm the lifelong connection between families and the "House That Love Built."



## World Children's Day 2007!!

November 20th marked the sixth annual World Children's Day, a global observance of children's causes and a fundraiser for Ronald McDonald House Charities. This year in Hawaii, World Children's Day promotions with McDonald's and the Honolulu Advertiser raised more than \$50,000 for RMHC-HI. Celebrities visited McDonald's Restaurants throughout the state to show their support.



RMHC-HI's Jerri Chong (left) holds the microphone for KHON-2 News' Manolo Morales during an interview



KITV-4 News Weekend Anchor Jill Kuramoto (middle) poses at the Kahala McDonald's with RMHC-HI's Reenie Rea (left) and Melanie Okazaki, McDonald's of Hawaii Marketing Manager



Sunrise on KGMB-9 Anchors Steve Uyehara and Grace Lum clown around with Ronald at the Makiki McDonald's



Employees at the Nimitz McDonald's told KHNL News 8 Anchor Howard Dashesky not to quit his day job.



KHNL News 8 Anchor Stephanie Lum really lights up a drive thru window!



# A Welcomed Homecoming



One late afternoon not too long ago, two tall gentlemen walked up to the front door of the Ronald McDonald House on Judd Hillside and hesitated, looking as though they were wondering whether or not to come inside. We invited them in, of course, and thus began an extraordinary visit to the House by Afoa "Titi" Nofoaagatoto'a and his son Kennedy, of American Samoa.



*Titi and Kennedy Nofoaagatoto'a*

They gladly shared their story with us.

Jordan had been a normal, active six-year-old boy when he was stricken and then hurriedly flown to Honolulu's Tripler Army Hospital for treatment. Initially, only mom could come with him. Jordan's brothers and sister were in school at the time and Titi had a job and the family business needed tending.

When doctors determined that Jordan would need chemotherapy and then a bone marrow transplant, the rest of the family flew to Hawaii and were tested as possible bone-marrow donors. Kennedy was the closest, with five out of six markers matching, but doctors wanted to keep looking for a perfect match. "That's when I knew that it would be a long process and would require severe adjustments," Titi said. He sold their small grocery store and was able to take temporary leave from his job. He enrolled their children in school here in Honolulu.

"We always hold our experience here at the Ronald McDonald House close to our hearts," Titi told us. "Being able to have brothers and sister around—the whole family together—was very comforting for Jordan. We were able to give him the best possible environment."

Things appeared to be progressing as planned, but during what was supposed to be Jordan's final chemotherapy, he got very sick and wound up in the Intensive Care Unit at the hospital for three months.

It was then that the family was told that Jordan could not survive the transplant procedure and that there

We soon learned that the two, as well as Titi's wife, Fou, and their two other children, Reagan and Renee, had stayed at the House more than eight years earlier, while Kennedy's younger brother Jordan was fighting leukemia.

were few or no options left. The doctor gently suggested that it might be time to just let Jordan enjoy the life he had left. "We prayed, and we thought a lot about it, and we even talked to Jordan," said Titi. "In the end, we decided to return to Samoa."

In a remarkable gesture of caring, his two nurses at Tripler Hospital took leave from their jobs to come to Samoa to help keep him comfortable. "We turned one of the rooms in our house into a small care center for him and air conditioned it," said Titi.

Titi said their experiences with Jordan here at the Ronald McDonald House resulted in many profound changes in their lives.

Kennedy, a student at the University of Hawaii, is pursuing a career in medicine because of his experiences during Jordan's illness. "I saw my brother in the hospital and I really wanted to be able to do something but at that age I couldn't do anything for him," Kennedy said regretfully. "So I figured I could maybe help others in the future not to go through that pain if I went to school and became a doctor."

In the years following Jordan's passing, the family opened two new businesses and has been able to build a new home. "A large one—like this," Titi said, gesturing around him. "In fact we modeled our house to be very much like this House."

Titi paused and then chuckled while telling us that when they were designing the new home, they looked at pictures of the Ronald McDonald House. "If you visit us, you will see a veranda and entrance very much like here. We wanted a place where people could come and stay, and a room to offer to the church for study groups." He said the House also has a special room set aside as Jordan's, where they keep his memory alive through photos and other memorabilia.

The family also actively supports organizations in Samoa that help children and communities. "When we were here and saw everything you were doing for families from all over, we decided that we wanted to do the same thing ourselves.

We are so thankful for what the Ronald McDonald House gave us—a place where we could all stay together to support our son. It was so important to us and we will be forever grateful," Titi added. "We will always treasure the memory of the family together here at the Ronald McDonald House."



*Jordan Nofoaagatoto'a*



*Afoa "Titi" Nofoaagatoto'a*

# An enchanting evening at the RMHC-HI Gala

Seven hundred people shared a magnificent and emotional evening at this year's RMHC-HI Gala fundraiser, December 2nd at the Hilton Hawaiian Village's Tapa Ballroom.

The event, which also capped off the organization's year-long observance of Ronald McDonald House Hawaii's 20th anniversary, honored the Sullivan family, which, headed by the late Maurice "Sully" Sullivan, has made so many significant contribu-

tions to RMHC-HI and the entire community.

The most moving part of the evening may have been the first person accounts by parents who described what it felt like to have a seriously ill child and the impact Ronald McDonald House has had on their lives.

Mahalo to everyone who attended and made it possible!



The Sullivans: Patrick, Joanna, Jenai, "Sully", Kitty and Colleen

## Mahalo to Our Shining Stars

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In photos above, Ruthie Mersburgh of Kailua-Kona wipes away a tear from mom Charlene's eye as dad Dan delivers a moving account of his family's difficult times following Ruthie's cancer diagnosis. Afterward, Dan and Ruthie show everyone that life is to be celebrated. In photo below, Tiata Salefoa and son Junior, House guests from Western Samoa, enjoy the night out.





*Reuben Wong, Blossom Tyau, Joanna Sullivan, Vera Wong, Kitty Wo*



*A toast to the Sullivan Family*



*Eric Watanabe, Mrs. Sullivan, Henry and Charlotte Clark*



*Dr. Jay Cambra (center) and Veronica Kaneko (2nd from right), surrounded by RMHC-HI families*



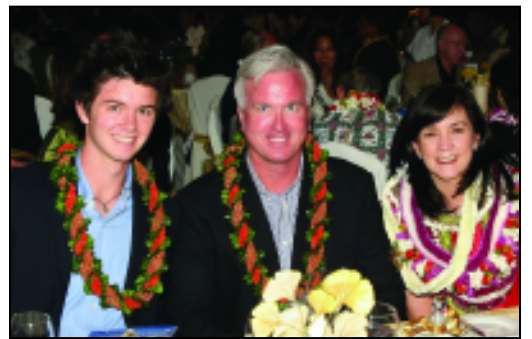
*Betty Wo, Mrs. Sullivan, Jerri Chong, Blossom Tyau*



*Kitty and Buzz Wo*



*Carolyn Luke, Debbie Lim, Warren K.K. Luke, Patrick Lim*



*Eamon, Roger and Jenai Wall*



*Kitty, Jenai, Mrs. Sullivan*



*Sue Wesselkamper, Dr. Lawrence K.W. Tseu, Mrs. Sullivan, Tom Wesselkamper*



*Alvin, Norah and Tai Yau Chung (seated) with Mrs. Sullivan*



*Jean and George Ariyoshi, Vicky and Ben Cayetano*



*Gretchen Jong, Lei Ahu Isa, Sandy Albano, Jerilyn Jeffryes*



*Betty Wo and Santa*



# Volunteer Spotlight



Mamie Murray

By Michael Ahakuelo

Let's shine the spotlight on Mamie Murray, volunteer extraordinaire! Mamie is a familiar sight at Ronald McDonald House, as she regularly drops off Cinnabons for the families. She also volunteers at the Ronald McDonald House Family Room. Actually, she has been helping kids and families by volunteering at the House for over 20 years. Mamie was part of the original "group of trainees" when the House first got started back in 1987.

She was teaching first grade at Holy Family Catholic School and earning her Masters in Elementary Education at the University of Hawaii when she first became aware of the organization. "I heard about the Ronald McDonald House and its wonderful work in media articles, and learned of its reputation in other states," says Mamie. "It motivated me to become part of what was obviously something special."



Mamie Murray, AKA "The Cinnabon Lady"

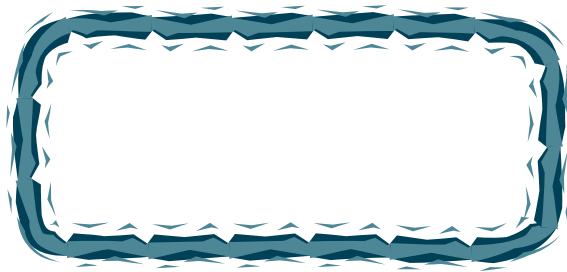
She says she has "answered phones, filed papers, done mail outs, counted coins, done grocery shopping with the families, and driven the Ronald McDonald van to take patients to Kapiolani Women's Hospital, and to pick up food at the Foodbank and Costco."

In the House's infancy, while working on an assignment to make cold calls and recruit businesses that were interested in lending their support, she recruited Cinnabons to be one of the House's first business donors. To this day, she still picks up Cinnabons at the Kahala Mall store, and drops them off at the House. When families and staff see Cinnabons on the kitchen counter, they all know that Mamie was here. She is also affectionately known as the "Cinnabon Lady."

Mamie says that she feels the Ronald McDonald House has been an important part of her everyday life—and a chance for her to make the world a better place. "I am committed to the Ronald McDonald House family for life," she says. "I feel that I can continue to make a difference in the whole scheme of things, even with my modest contributions."

After all these years, Mamie says she believes more than ever that the Ronald McDonald House is a place for children and families to feel safe, supported and comforted in the midst of very difficult times and says, "That's why I'm still here!"

Find out all about volunteering at RMHC-HI on our website, [www.ronaldhousehawaii.org](http://www.ronaldhousehawaii.org).



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