



Aloha

From Our House to Yours

www.RonaldHouseHawaii.org

Newsletter of Ronald McDonald House Charities® Hawaii

Issue 1, January 2019

Knowing you're not alone is part of the survival

A year ago, Toby and Mihana Tait-Jamieson never thought they would be living at a Ronald McDonald House.

This loving couple from the Big Island both enjoy helping others in the community. Mihana is a youth therapist; Toby is a contractor building trendy tiny homes. Last year, the couple welcomed their first child and cherished the joyful experience.

"I was really excited," Mihana said. "It was an easy pregnancy. I was grateful to be in Hawaii during my pregnancy and be able to go for hikes, walks on the beach, and relax."

But soon after baby Taj was born, Toby and Mihana noticed their daughter would cry throughout the night and couldn't be comforted. They brought her to the emergency room where Taj was diagnosed with a urinary tract infection.

But the sleepless nights and crying continued and their instincts told them something was seriously wrong. They returned to the emergency room three more times over the next 10 days, but



Mihana, Toby and Taj Tait-Jamieson on the front lawn at the Ronald McDonald House



there was no diagnosis or relief for Taj. Frantic, Mihana began calling specialists on Oahu, trying to get answers and medical care for their baby.

"We knew we needed to be on Oahu, so we flew to Honolulu the very next day, went to the emergency room at Kapiolani Medical Center, and begged them to help us."

No one could figure out what was wrong with Taj until a CT scan revealed a tumor in her lungs, and then another cancerous tumor on her spine. Toby and Mihana finally had a name for what was wrong with their baby. She had Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare soft tissue cancer. Doctors told them that Taj had a survival rate of just five years.

"Our world just flipped upside down," said Mihana. "We didn't know what we were going to do. We didn't even know where we were going to stay or how we would take care of Taj. Then, we heard about the Ronald McDonald House. We were going through chaos and turmoil, but to be welcomed to this safe and quiet place, where we could process what was going on and just care for Taj while she was very fragile. It was amazing. It was a miracle. That all these people wanted to help us, to help families with babies and

children, survive and thrive, and have a chance to go on and lead healthy lives."

Those early days were very traumatic. Taj was receiving chemotherapy and a natural medicine to support her immune system. Then came the difficult decision to remove the tumor on her spine, which was an extremely risky surgery.

"It's a very lonely experience when your child is sick. You're at the center of the storm, but to know you are not alone is part of the survival," Mihana shared.

For almost seven months, the family stayed at the Ronald McDonald House in Manoa, and the other families, staff, and volunteers became their extended ohana.

Taj will celebrate her first birthday in January. She has grown up here. She's taken her first steps at the House, knows where to find all her favorite toys, always has a ready smile for her hanai "aunties and uncles". People always tell Mihana that "Taj is such a social baby, a real social butterfly!" Her response is, "It's because of the Ronald McDonald House. This place has made her that way. She's able to play with everyone and they all just love her."



Message from our President



Jerri Chong

Aloha,
2018 was a year of great joy and celebration for my family – a new grandchild, my first, made every holiday a new experience brimming with

excitement and anticipation. So it is always a tug at my heartstrings when I see so many families, strikingly similar to my own, spending cherished family holidays far from their friends and loved ones.

This was the 32nd Christmas that Hawaii's Ronald McDonald House has served as a home-away-from home for families during the holidays. Although sometimes bittersweet, the experience is also different from what most would expect.

People often think that a Ronald McDonald House must be a sad or at least a very somber place because of the gravity of the families' situations.

But we hear children's laughter all the time, and the comforting sounds of families preparing meals and sharing activities together, like watching TV or playing video games, having story time, even doing laundry. It's these common, everyday moments that families hang on to, where kids go on being kids and the healing process begins, not just for the child, but the entire family. There is joy and infinite gratitude for all of life's blessings, no matter how small.

What is especially humbling is the opportunity to see the very best of the human spirit. I see it in the incredible kindness and compassion that people show to strangers. I see it in the families at the House, being at their very best even while going through their very worst; supporting each other, celebrating the good days and sharing the tough ones. But the best are the children – kids just being kids – naughty, cranky, silly, and loving. Angling for a treat out of my candy bowl. Pouting at bath time. Sprawled

on grandma, begging for a second story. Sitting around the dinner table, eating mom's chili and rice. That's the best part of my job. Seeing, sharing, and experiencing these family moments that are so precious in my own family.

The difference is that every family at the Ronald McDonald House has a very sick child, and most families can only look ahead one day at a time. So at our Ronald McDonald House, instead of Happy Easter, Happy Thanksgiving, or Happy Holidays, we like to say "Happy Every Day". Because every day is precious, every day gives us reason to celebrate, and every day is one step closer to home at the House that Love Built.

Mahalo to all of you who are part of our extended Ohana, for your support and generosity, and for embracing our families with hope and joy during their greatest time of need. From our House to yours, the best for 2019.

"Aloha From Our House to Yours", the newsletter of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii (RMHC-HI), is published three times a year.



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The Ronald McDonald House Provided Hope

“You want your child to live like every other child, you never expect them to be born with special conditions.”



Savannah Quenga and her husband Andrew never imagined their son Elijah would need heart surgery just two weeks after being born. He was diagnosed with Di George Syndrome, which is a chromosomal disorder resulting in poor development of several body systems including congenital heart problems and autoimmune disorders. He also has autism, which has added another dimension to his care.

“I was a first-time mother at that time, only 19 years-old. It was extremely tough the first months and years of his life.”

To add to their worries, there were no pediatric cardiologist specialists who worked on their home island of Guam, so her son had to be flown to California where he received heart surgery.

“I remember crying and holding my family. Every surgery has risks, especially that one because doctors had to stop my son’s heart. We had a hard time letting him go. It brings on so much anxiety.” Elijah spent more than nine hours in

surgery. Seconds felt like minutes and minutes felt like hours. Savannah recalls that day being the longest of her life.

Most recently, Elijah broke his elbow and was flown to Oahu for surgery. Shortly after he arrived, he also experienced a seizure that doctors are now monitoring. Despite all of the uncertainties and challenges, his mom says how thankful she is for the family services and support they have received. “I felt alone when we came here, but speaking to the other families has given me hope,” says Savannah. “I have no idea what we would have done without the Ronald McDonald House. It’s truly a home-away-from-home filled with people who care.”



The Quenga family have now stayed in three Ronald McDonald Houses throughout Elijah’s journey. The House has been there for them every step of the way. “I never imagined living this life. I wouldn’t have it any other way. All the hard work is well worth it. We have had our ups and downs, but my son is as healthy as he can be.”

Miracle on Merchant Street!

Don and Marion Murphy with Murphy’s Bar and Grill have been hosting Miracle on Merchant Street for more than 30 years for the Hawaii Ronald McDonald House. Every December, Don and Marion host a toy drive at the restaurant around the holidays. The loving couple open their hearts and restaurant to the community and the RMHC Hawaii families. Guests bring a toy for the families and they enjoy a free delicious buffet meal. The restaurant is able to close off a whole block of the street fronting their downtown restaurant to provide a spectacular holiday event. Families enjoyed a trolley ride around downtown Honolulu. This year was a huge success and families enjoyed the wonderful food and entertainment!



Mihana, Toby, and Taj Tait-Jamieson on the trolley ride.



Marion Murphy with RMHC child 'Imiloa.



The Naboa family enjoying dinner at the Miracle on Merchant Street holiday event.



Don and Marion Murphy hosting Miracle on Merchant Street.

Black & White

Share a Night Gala

Mahalo to all our sponsors, auction donors, suppliers and everyone who attended our Black & White themed Share A Night Gala at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, helping to raise more than \$300,000 for our Ronald House programs. Over 500 attendees joined us to enjoy cocktails, competitive bidding on an assortment of silent and live auction items, heart-warming comments from RMH families and top local entertainers performing to big band music. A special thank you to Entertainment Director Nancy Bernal, Emcee Al Waterson, Auctioneer Eric Schiff, Royal Hawaiian Movers, the many volunteers and groups who gave of their time to make the evening a success.

Mahalo to Our Shining Stars

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Cocktails and great silent auction items tempt guests into bidding



RMHC family Jordan, little Bella and Kelly share their story



Miss Hawaii Penelope Ng Pack displays an auto-graphed Paul McCartney bass guitar as auctioneer Eric Schiff takes a bid



Frances Hill, Hersh Singer and RMHC Hawaii President Jerri Chong



Comedian Frank De Lima had the crowd laughing



Melanie Okazaki, Eugene Villaluz, Anita and Victor Lim



Jordan Segundo, Ginai & Shari Lynn have fun with Uptown Funk finale



Ali Chisti, Hannah Bancroft, Annie Stamps and Dustin Ridgeway



Rick and Renee Nakashima with Whit and Camille Michel

Ways The Community Supports Us

Mahalo to **Bank of Hawaii** who selected us as one of 23 beneficiaries of its 2018 Live Kōkua Giving Campaign. Bank of Hawaii employees donated a record-breaking total of \$760,132 which was announced at BOH's annual Tree Lighting Celebration on Dec. 10.



A special thank you to the **Maurice and Joanna Sullivan Family Foundation** for the generous \$50,000 donation to the Ronald McDonald House. The gift will be used to expand RMHC's energy conservation and Cooling Down-Greening Up Program.



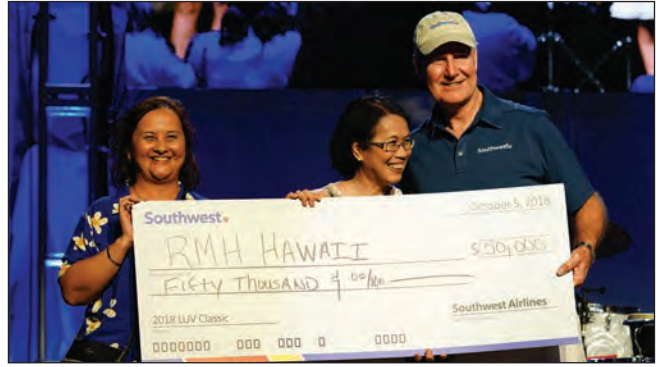
We are so grateful to the **Macy's** volunteers for assisting with decorating the Ronald McDonald House for the holiday season!

Southwest Airlines Donates \$50,000 to Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Hawaii

Southwest Airlines recently awarded \$50,000 to Ronald McDonald House Charities Hawaii at their annual LUV Classic Golf Tournament in Dallas, Texas.

Every year at the LUV Classic, Southwest Airlines supports Ronald McDonald House Charities across the nation. This year, their gift to RMHC's Hawaii Chapter also celebrates the Airlines' plan to enter the Hawaii market and provide inter-island and transpacific services to the Hawaiian Islands.

Southwest Airlines' donation will support the expansion and renovation of the children's indoor and outdoor play areas and create a family-centered recreation room at the Judd Hillside Ronald McDonald House.



Development Director Candace Asam-Lopez and RMHC Hawaii President Jerri Chong with Gary Kelly, Southwest Airlines Chairman/CEO



Do you want to have McFun?

Purchase RMHC Hawaii's McFun-Raiser Coupon Booklets. Raise money for your organization, school group, club or sports team while still raising money for the Hawaii Ronald McDonald House. For more information, please visit www.ronaldhousehawaii.org or email cal@rmhchawaii.org

What's inside the coupon booklet?

- 1 FREE Hamburger
- 1 FREE small order of French Fries
- 1 Free Ice-Cream Cone
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- 1 Buy any Large Sandwich & get 1 FREE
- 1 Buy any Breakfast Sandwich & get 1 FREE



Dollars for Donuts



PURVÉ

Ronald McDonald House Hawaii is partnering with PURVÉ Donut Stop! For every 2 dollar donation during the month of February, you will receive a FREE specially created RMHC donut to help critically ill children and their families.

At the end of the month there will also be a giveaway. Just follow @ronaldhousehi & @purvedonutstop on Instagram with your donation and you'll be entered to win a \$100 MOKU gift card and 2 dozen PURVE donuts.

You can help PURVÉ reach their goal to raise \$5,000 or more for RMHC Hawaii. Mahalo!



Thank you to the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation's "Sharing the Joys of the Holidays" project. Jayna Osada from the Weinberg Foundation selected RMHC Hawaii to receive the \$10,000 grant.



Ronald McDonald House Charities® of Hawaii

1970 Judd Hillside Road
P.O. Box 61777
Honolulu, Hawaii 96839-1777
Phone: (808) 973-5683
info@rmhchawaii.org
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To RMHC,

Thank you all so much for everything this year. I really appreciate how you allowed me to volunteer at the Ronald McDonald House.

Being a part of RMHC has taught me so much about people's resilience through hard situations and how important it is to be surrounded by a supportive family as I saw so many families supporting each other. I've also loved building relationships with families and hearing their stories as well as yours. Thanks for making the House feel like my second home. Thank you all so much for your kindness. I'll be back.

- RMHC Volunteer Chenoa Jesser



For more information visit www.ronaldhousehi.org or call (808) 973-5683 to volunteer.