



Aloha

# From Our House to Yours

www.RonaldHouseHawaii.org

Newsletter of Ronald McDonald House Charities® Hawaii

Issue 1, February 2020

## Sharing Helps the Healing Process

Family has always been central for the Semeatu-Luaifoas. A close knit and loving family from American Samoa, their extended layers range from a two-year-old toddler and little ones in grammar school, to an active middle schooler, and their first born—the first to attend college at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. For Ralph and Seuga Semeatu-Luaifoa, their cup was overflowing with blessings.

Nothing could have prepared them for the double crisis their family would go through, or the tremendous amount of strength they would find through the love and encouragement of so many others supporting them through their difficult journey.



The Semeatu-Luaifoas

Last summer, the children were healthy and happy, and all seemed well. Ralph worked at the American Samoa Power Authority and Seuga was an accountant. Grandparents and family helped with the younger ones, and life was good. But little Nina, their youngest, had a constant cold, sore throat, and fever that just wouldn't go away. She was eventually diagnosed with dengue fever, spent time in and out of the hospital, but still didn't get

better. Her health deteriorated and blood counts dropped, and last August, the family was told that Nina had acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Even more devastating, there was no treatment available for her at the hospital in American Samoa.

Ralph and Seuga knew Nina needed specialized medical care very quickly. They both left their jobs, and entrusted their home and other children to family members. They sold their car to pay for airfare and took the first available flight to Honolulu. After landing at the airport, suitcases in tow, they went directly to Kapiolani Hospital. Nina was admitted and treatment started immediately.

Life is still very uncertain for Nina and her family. She will need more than two years of treatment, chemotherapy, possible surgeries and other medical protocols. She needs to remain in Hawaii. But most of all, she needs her family. Her parents and siblings, people who love and embrace her, providing comfort and security, hope and joy.

Ralph lights up, remembering when they found out the Ronald McDonald House would be their home while Nina was going through treatment. It meant that her siblings – who she missed dearly and cried for – could join them. Nathaniel and Natalie came in November, and the family celebrated the holidays together. Thirteen-year-old Nicholas would come later, after finishing the school semester.

But, just as Nicholas was about to fly to Oahu, he was diagnosed with a serious heart condition. He had been experiencing knee and leg pain, a sore throat, and a constant fever. Further tests diagnosed Nicholas with rheumatic fever and leakage in his heart's left arterial vein, putting his

health in serious jeopardy. Now, more than ever, Ralph and Seuga needed to rally around their family and harness coping skills to care for two children needing specialized care. Fortunately, Nicholas' disease is in the moderate



Nina playing with her sister Natalie

stage and surgery can be avoided with medication, healthy eating, good lifestyle habits, and access to quality health care.

As for Nina, she gets chemotherapy treatments and IV's weekly and a spinal tap every two weeks. She carries her treatment in a Chemotherapy Infuser bag that looks like a backpack when not at the hospital and takes maintenance medicines every weekend. But she doesn't even notice it anymore.

Initially, Nina was confined to bed rest when she wasn't in the hospital. Now, she wants to play with her siblings and new friends at the House, whenever she can. "She loves every room, and everything at the house," Seuga said. "We love seeing her so happy and just enjoying every day, just like any other child."

In the meantime, Seuga got a job as an accountant for a local company, while Ralph became a "stay-at-home"

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# Message from our President



Jerri Chong

Aloha,  
Happy New Year!  
At the Ronald McDonald House, we are grateful for all the community's support. Your caring and generous donations of time

and money enable our cornerstone program to continue and welcome families in desperate need of support during their child's illness. Mahalo to all of you whose hearts have gone out to our charity and helped make Ronald McDonald House the "home away from home" that it is.

2019 went by with dizzying speed and a timeline of many benchmarks and milestones. During the year, more than 350 families with seriously ill children spent 4,400 nights at one of our two Houses in Manoa. We raised the age of eligibility for sick children from 18 to 21 to accommodate children falling between the cracks – aging into young adulthood, but still

treated by pediatric surgeons and specialists, and being cared for by their parents.

Both houses went "green", with energy efficient appliances, lighting, heating, and cooling, realizing 50-75% overall energy savings, while providing a much more comfortable environment for our families. And we launched a capital campaign to fund much needed repairs and expansion plans to create a family recreation area at Judd Hillside, a two-story, multi-use space where children, teens, parents, and multiple families can gather and support each other during a child's recovery.

And so, we welcomed the new year with a flurry of activity! In January we replaced the crumbling 80-year-old roof at our Judd Hillside house. And earlier this month, construction began to transform our children's playroom into the family recreation area. Construction will take about four months while the Judd Hillside House is closed, but no families will be turned away. Our Oahu Avenue House is still

open and operating, and thanks to a wonderful and generous partnership with the Aqua Ohia Hotel in Waikiki, families in need of our services will still be lodged and taken care of during their child's medical emergency. Family suites at the hotel, along with daily support services, transportation, and supply bins filled with groceries and other household goods will be provided by RMHC to the families.

I find it both exhilarating and humbling to report that, last year, volunteers gave of themselves in unprecedented ways and numbers, and that more individuals and businesses came forward to support our cause financially than ever before! We are hopeful and optimistic that the caring will continue.

Thank you on behalf of the hundreds of families-in-crisis who you are helping to survive, cope, and even thrive during the worst times for their families.

Sincerely,

Jerri Chong, RMHC Hawaii President

**"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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**Sharing Helps** continued from page 1  
dad at the Ronald McDonald House. He takes care of the children, schedules all the doctor appointments and treatments, and has become an accomplished cook. "It's like starting all over," he said.

"Ronald McDonald House has been a blessing in our lives," said Seuga. "It's the environment and staff and

other families sharing their stories, supporting and encouraging us that gives us hope."

Ralph added, "God sends down angels for everyone. Ronald McDonald House is our angel. They don't just provide a house, they take care of you. Volunteers cook and staff is always around to provide transportation and other support. It's not just a job for them. They really care."

Ralph said one of the hardest parts of being a guest at Ronald McDonald House is seeing other families leave. "We have all become such good friends and we support and are there for each other. Everyone is family, and we miss people when they leave. But, then of course—you know they are healed and we're really happy and wish them well."

"One day that will be us!"

# Going Home

For those who stay at Ronald McDonald House, it's a blessing to have other families around to share stories, food, culture, and compassion with. But it's both sad and wonderful to see someone leave the House. While they will be missed, "leaving the House" means their medical treatments are done and they are healed or well on their way to recovery.

January 16 was a joyous day for April Ngalu. After six months at the House, she and her mother and father returned to American Samoa.

April was two-years-old when she was diagnosed with leukemia. Her parents, Lesina and Enosa, were told by doctors back home that she needed to travel to Hawaii for further diagnosis and medical care.

The Ngalus had an additional challenge: mom Lesina, originally from Western Samoa, could not travel with her daughter and husband to Hawaii; she had to return to Western Samoa to update her Visa, which could take six months. Enosa brought April to Hawaii

himself, supporting her as her health deteriorated and her treatments began.

Initially, April and her dad stayed with a relative in Waipahu, driving into town for her treatments and appointments. Lesina was able to join them in early 2018. Then, she and Enosa took turns staying with April while the other would return to American Samoa to work.

In 2019, the family—reunited—moved into the Ronald McDonald House. April was able to get her treatments nearby, as well as meet others at the House and experience the care and support from staff, volunteers, and other House guests going through similar situations.

And just last month, they welcomed in the new year, celebrating the end of April's treatments and saying farewell as the delightful youngster excitedly got ready to return home to the Pacific Islands.

"The Ronald McDonald House was a blessing for us and gave us so much hope and positive energy," Lesina said. "They provided everything: care, room and board, and transportation when



April Ngalu and her family

we needed it. Everyone was from different places – countries, states, islands – but we shared food and stories. The other guests were so wonderful and the staff was so nice."

Now five years old and back in American Samoa, April is doing well. Lesina said their family misses everyone, but is happy that April's leukemia is in remission and are so grateful for the support of Ronald McDonald House and all the people at the House that Love Built.

# Miracle on Merchant Street

Don and Marion Murphy, owners of Murphy's Bar and Grill, have opened their hearts and restaurant to the community and RMHC Hawaii families for the holidays for more than 30 years. Their toy drive and delicious buffet meals bring smiles to everyone's faces.

Last holiday season was no exception. The Murphys hosted the event on December 11, offering a trolley ride

with a tour of downtown city lights, Santa visits, and a large screen movie, as well as toys donated by guests. *Mahalo* to this loving couple—whose event cheers up the community and our RMHC families each year!



Don and Marion Murphy host Miracle on Merchant Street.



Children delight in holiday gift arrivals.



Miracle on Merchant Street Celebration.



Waiting for Santa.

# Sparkle & Shine

## Share a Night Gala



2019 Gala Honorees Al Waterson & Nancy Bernal

Mahalo to all our sponsors, auction donors, suppliers and everyone who attended our Sparkle & Shine themed Share A Night Gala at the Sheraton Waikiki Resort, 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 honor their friends, Al & Nancy, who also served as Emcee and Entertainment Director respectively. A special thank you to Auctioneer Eric Schiff, Royal Hawaiian Movers, and 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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Michael Paulo and Glenn Medeiros have fun performing.



Ben & Vicky Cayetano, Honorees Nancy Bernal & Al Waterson and Ginny Tiu.



Kitty Wo, RMHC President Jerri Chong, Denise Hayashi Yamaguchi holding Mika, and Cathy Lee.



The Feldman family share their RMHC experience and little Liam raises his arms as mom introduces him.



American Idol finalist Jordan Segundo was a highlight in the outstanding lineup of entertainment.



Guests view and bid on the multitude of silent auction items.



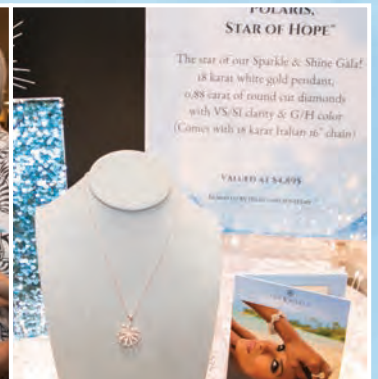
Our friends from McDonald's and all our guests ready to enjoy their meal and fellowship.



Troy Wada holds the autographed Eagles guitar he won at the live auction. He is joined by friends and Miss Hawaii Nikki Holbrook.



Guest decide which fabulous lucky drawing to drop their tickets in with the top prize being the Polaris Star of Hope diamond necklace from Hildgund Jewelers.



# Ways The Community Supports Us

A big Mahalo to our wonderful volunteers. Your extra hands and support make Ronald McDonald House a "Home Away from Home."



House guests enjoyed festivities and pumpkins provided by RAI Trade Marketing Services last October.



Coast Guard District 14 service men and women threw a taco party.



Marriott's Ko Olina Beach Club team hosted a pasta extravaganza.



With the help of more than 100 volunteers our Share-A-Night Gala was a fun filled and successful night!



House guests enjoyed Sunday lunch served by the Serving Sabers.



Amano Construction hosted dinner and took down Christmas decorations.



Meet our Sunday deep clean team from First Hawaiian Bank.

# It Takes Ohana—and a Security Blanket

Six-year-old Jaylin has his whole life ahead of him thanks to modern medicine and ohana that stayed by his side as he fought cancer twice.

Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in October 2018, his entire family worked as a team to help Jaylin get better. Although his parents were no longer together, everyone stepped up and put Jaylin first. The whole family was involved—both sets of grandparents, Naomi and Papa Jason; Mama Tani and Papa Paulino; and his mom and dad—Mahealani and Philip,” said grandma Naomi. They flew back and forth from their homes on Lanai to Oahu, working in pairs, tandem, individually, or as a whole unit, always making sure someone was right by his side.

Jaylin was in the hospital initially for three weeks, then required long-term follow-up treatment. “We didn’t know what we were going to do. Then we found out about the Ronald McDonald House,” said Naomi.

Jaylin’s family stayed at the House for 6 months. Papa Jason was there almost the whole time, so that Jaylin’s parents could go back to work. But most weeks, family members took turns commuting back and forth from home and jobs on Lanai to the hospital and Ronald McDonald House.

Then, in November—just before Thanksgiving—Jaylin was diagnosed with a more aggressive and rare form of leukemia in his bones. “Fifty percent of his body had leukemia,” said Naomi.

“Our world turned upside down. Jaylin was back in the hospital and this was a really, really rough time.”

“But Ronald McDonald House was there for us and helped us get through the hardship! Every day, coming home and driving up the driveway gave us a feeling of security and

hope that we could get through this. We were in our own bubble. Staying in the security bubble meant everything to us. It’s truly the House that Love Built—our security blanket.

“Everything and everyone was there for us. A helping hand, a shoulder to lean on, compassion and caring. The dinner table was where all the families would congregate, where we laughed,



Naomi, Jaylin, Papa Jason



Jaylin Ohashi Bolo

cried, and shared. And Jaylin knew the House inside out. For him, it was home. We will forever be grateful for everything the House has done for our Jaylin,” said Naomi.

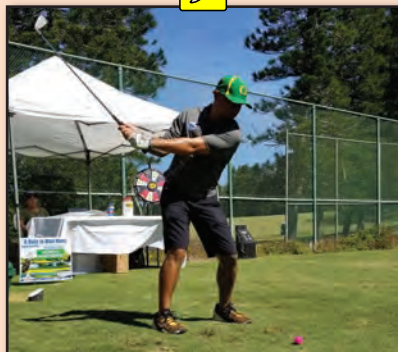
Naomi said Jaylin is doing 110% better. He has no cancer cells, but is on a maintenance program. He’s passed the one year marker, cancer free, but still comes to Oahu for monthly chemotherapy and check-ups. And it’s always such a joyous occasion to see Jaylin and celebrate how well he’s doing!

## APIII Golf Tournament

In memory of Anthony “Tony” Pereira III, Midas Hawaii owners, Bob and Dianne Pereira, host a golf tournament to benefit Ronald McDonald House Charities. This year, 139 players participated at the fundraising event held at the Mid Pacific Country Club on January 27th, raising over \$46,000.



Dianne and Bob Pereira



Golfers helped raise funds for RMHC.

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Next time you visit a McDonald's restaurant, please consider giving a small donation right when you order by rounding up your total to the nearest dollar.

**Here's how you can donate:**

**At Kiosk:** Choose to "Round-Up" your total during checkout.

**At Counter and Drive Thru:** Let a Crew Member know you would like to "Round-Up" when you place your order. Cash donations are also accepted in the RMHC Donation Boxes.

**Volunteer Spotlight**  
**Meadow Gold**

Meadow Gold Hawaii's goodwill ambassador, Lani Moo, takes the spotlight in our Volunteer Corner this month. She represents a company that champions healthy babies, active kids, and wholesome lifestyles that support and celebrate families in Hawaii. Lani and Meadow Gold are a big part of The Ronald McDonald House recipe for healthy living, donating thousands of gallons of milk and juice, and tons of frozen fruit and dairy products for our families for nearly 30 years. Some of our earliest guests at the House now have children of their own, and they're enjoying and growing up with the same nutritional products that Meadow Gold provided for families during their stay with us.



Said longtime company president and RMHC supporter, Glenn Muranaka, "Healthy babies and healthy children mirror the benefits of the nutritional value of milk. It's the perfect food. And it's such a humbling opportunity for Meadow Gold to be able to help and provide healthy options to some of our most vulnerable children by supporting this wonderful charity."

***Thank you Meadow Gold, Glenn, and Lani Moo for three decades of taking care of our Ronald McDonald House children and families!***