

# heartstrings

Fall/ Winter 2022



Eli, Struthers and Cami Bremer

"Before the arrival of Struthers, Eli and I had dreams of outdoor adventures, family hikes, bike rides and living the Colorado lifestyle as a family of three. *However, our family of three almost became a family of one in fall, 2014.* "

— Cami Bremer

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Ronald McDonald  
House Charities®  
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<https://www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/>



My husband, Eli, wondered which bedside to be at.

*With me in the Cardiac ICU and our son, Struthers, fighting for his life across the hospital, we experienced some of the darkest hours of our lives.*

**A social worker told us she had a room ready at the Ronald McDonald House.**

For my family, staying at the House meant we no longer needed to decide who would be alone at night in the busy hospital room. We didn't have to navigate a late night drive on a long, dark highway when we were already exhausted. There was no worrying where our next meal would come from, or that the hospital cafeteria and restaurants would be closed when we left our child's bedside. We no longer needed to tell friends and family that there was no place to visit, hug, cry, grieve or pray privately.

***With the Ronald McDonald House, we never felt we were walking this awful road alone.***

I'm grateful for our "Home-Away-from-Home". While not a place we prepared for - or dreamed of - the warmth, comfort, friendship and strength found inside the walls of the House was more than we ever hoped for in our hours, days, weeks and months of greatest need.

When we first learned we were expecting, we were overjoyed - and cautious - as I was high risk. A team of medical experts was committed to helping us navigate our dream of having a family.

As much as we learned, we knew our little boy might arrive early. However, nothing prepared us for the downward spiral both mine and his health would take. Beginning at around 25 weeks' gestation, I was already inpatient with twice-daily fetal monitoring and weekly ultrasounds. The results painted a scary picture. Our child was not growing (dropping from 20th to 11th to 3rd percentiles) and he didn't have a normal heart rate for his gestational age.

When my blood pressure stabilized, our precious son suffered. For 16 days, it was a delicate balance. And, then the scales tipped. **Simplified, instead of my body sustaining him, he began sustaining me.**

After an abnormal fetal monitoring and ultrasound confirmed the blood flow was not reaching our son, it became obvious that he would do better outside my womb. It was time to call Eli.



**heartstrings 2**



He rushed to the hospital and walked into my empty room, as I had already been whisked to the OR.

Seeing each other, there were tears of relief as the delivery room nurses 'suited Eli up', preparing for a cesarean-section. After recording a little video for our son and snapping a couple of pictures, I squeezed Eli's hand tighter than I ever thought possible.

***And, then, we heard a cry.***

None of us were expecting that. Between the dire-sounding fetal monitoring and knowing that, at 27 weeks, our son's lungs weren't yet fully developed, I wondered if that's really what I'd heard. And then it was there, again. That sweet sound marked the beginning of an incredible journey with a little 1-lb miracle boy.

Soon, I recovered and was released from the hospital.

What an incredible gift it was to stay together as Struthers fought for his life. We were told to expect a 3-month stay in the NICU. We watched as this tiny human fought multiple infections, a heart defect, vision problems and lungs too fragile to work for themselves.

For months, anytime we walked into the Ronald McDonald House or a Family Room – even when we carried grief, sadness or fear - we left with hope, gratefulness and joy. ***The people, routines and emotions experienced inside those walls will change people's lives forever.***

Staying at the Ronald McDonald House helped us understand how to change other things, too - ventilator settings, to do daily "cares", and eventually, feeding our son as he grew. There was time for snuggling and kangaroo care. **We were thankful!**

***After 105 days, Struthers was discharged from the NICU.*** As a micro-preemie, he's had his share of setbacks. Each time, Ronald McDonald House has helped our family turn our darkest hours into a miracle of love, comfort and provision.

Struthers continues to grow and develop at his own little pace, remaining on oxygen for 6 years (still needing it periodically). This year, his feeding tube was removed. We continue to celebrate every milestone - he's come so far.

Today, our son is a thriving, happy, brilliant and resilient 7-year old. Our 2nd Grader loves playing with legos, reading, skiing, swimming, frisbee and golf. Recently, he completed a 15 - mile bike ride over a Colorado mountain pass.

Our family enjoys serving and finding special ways to "give back" to a place that is such an integral part of our harrowing, miraculous journey.



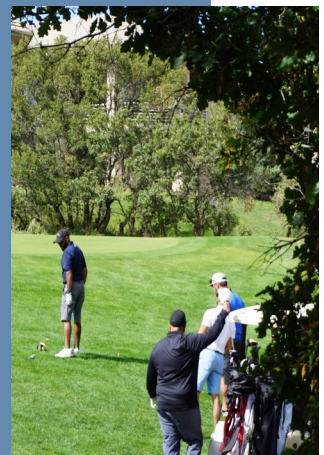


I'm honored to serve on the Board of Directors of Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado. We recruit friends and family to join us in making meals and treats for families who find themselves at the Colorado Springs House. Struthers' birthday always includes loving on the families there, along with praying the blessing we have certainly experienced in our special "Home-Away-from-Home".

"You will be blessed when you go in and you will be blessed when you go out." —Deuteronomy 28:6 - - Cami Bremer



## Celebrating Seasons of Gratitude and Fun!



From a summer Luau that celebrated our amazing volunteers, an epic 80's dance party that honored RMHCSC's 35 years of care, to our 30th Annual Golf Tournament, we are grateful for the many hands that have made light work. THANK YOU!

# The Answers...

to your most frequently asked questions.



**Q: Who stays at the Ronald McDonald House?**

A: Our Ronald McDonald House becomes a HOME for families of critically ill children who are receiving the care they require at area hospitals.

**Q: Are families charged for their stay?**

A: No. Families are never charged for staying at the Ronald McDonald House - whether here for days, weeks or months.

**Q: Do you accept volunteers?**

A: YES! We LOVE our volunteers! To learn more, (and to complete a volunteer application), please visit our website, [www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org](http://www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org).

**Q: What volunteer opportunities are there?**

A: Volunteers serve at the Ronald McDonald House and at the Ronald McDonald Family Room inside Children's Hospital Colorado, Colorado Springs. We offer individual, pair and group volunteer opportunities.

**Q: Do I have to be a certain age to volunteer?**

A: The minimum age for House volunteers is 10 (with an accompanying parent or guardian) and 18 for unaccompanied volunteers.

**Q: Do you have a Wish List I can help with?**

A: Yes! You'll find a list on our website at [www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/wish-list/](http://www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/wish-list/)

**Q: What about meals? Can I help?**

A: Yes! As an individual, pair, family or group, you bring the recipe and ingredients to prepare brunch or dinner in our big, beautiful kitchen. For more information, contact [heather@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org](mailto:heather@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org)

**Q: Can I make a donation?**

A: YES! We gratefully accept monetary donations of any amount, to include memorial, honorary gifts and/or planned and legacy gifts.

**Q: What if I have other questions?**

A: Please visit our website, [www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org](http://www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org) to learn more and get involved!



## A New Holiday Tradition... join the fun!

# The Christmas Tree Festival

Benefiting Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado

**Sunday December 4th, 10am- 1pm**

**The Pinery at the Hill**

Learn more at <https://www.rmhcsoutherncolorado.org/the-christmas-tree-festival-2>

**heartstrings 5**



# Our House

Over the last six months we've provided warm comforting meals, relaxing beds and a friendly face to 300 families, nearly 900 guests. Our families have enjoyed summer BBQs, game nights, art therapy evenings, Dads and Donuts, Moms and Muffins and more. They have rallied to cheer on the Avalanche, the Broncos and the Rockies.

Having a moment to smile, meet new people and rest has provided the much needed respite our families need to take care of themselves and their children.

As you can see, our House was not the only Ronald McDonald House to Cheer on the Avs!



For the 500+ children served annually at our Ronald McDonald House, (some with disabilities), the current outdoor play space required modifications.

Our Ronald McDonald House is adapting the outdoor play area to make it more inclusive, *because we believe every child wants to play*. Leading the way is a permanent, new addition, Liam's Lighthouse. This generous gift from Liam's parents, Chris and Michelle, and the Liam's Lighthouse Foundation has brought wonder and delight for many children.

For all who have helped bring this new play area into focus, THANK YOU. We are honored by your care.

Stay tuned for a ribbon cutting, Spring of 2023.

Should you want to know more, or how you might get involved, please reach out to [sam@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org](mailto:sam@rmhcsoutherncolorado.org)

## A Clear Vision

**Every child experiencing a critical illness or serious injury wants to feel normal, be included and have fun.**

To the countless people, and for the many ways you've contributed!

Thank You




We are honored by our friends at Dutch Bros., the Pikes Peak United Way, McDonald's Owner/Operators, Riders for Children, RAZZ, our incredible volunteers and many more whose care and support helps us keep families together when they need it most.

"Our little granddaughter came 6 weeks early and was flown from the western slope to Colorado Springs within hours of her birth, while her mother recovered from an emergency caesarean. Three days later, after 8 hours of driving, we were welcomed to the Ronald McDonald House. We didn't know such a lovely place existed. By the time we got to our room and found the diaper bag and hand-crocheted baby blanket, we were absolutely overwhelmed by the kindness of strangers.

We are so very grateful to your family for providing a room for us to stay in while we wait for our baby girl to grow strong enough to leave the NICU. It is such a godsend, while we are many miles from our home, to have a warm and comfortable place to sleep after long hours at the hospital.

Thank you for your compassion and generosity for families like ours."

Our warmest wishes for you and your families! 

## A Shared Experience

The particulars of each family's story may be different but the circumstances which brought them to our House are similar. A sick or injured child is transported for medical care. Their families follow to a city far from home to be near their child. How do parents and family remain close if that care lingers on for days, weeks or months? Our Ronald McDonald House provides warm meals, a comfortable room and unconditional support for as long as is necessary without families ever receiving a bill!

**heartstrings 7**



**Ronald McDonald  
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## **Thank You!**

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Scott Angelos, Dave & Kevin Napier, James & Paul Nelson  
McDonald's-Denver Field Office

# **Giving Back!**

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...every time you buy fries at McDonald's, **local McDonald's owners** support our House with a penny for every pound of fries sold. When you purchase a Happy Meal our charity benefits. These same owners sponsor events, sustain rooms and give you the opportunity to contribute to our House through the "Round Up" program, donation boxes and employee giving campaigns.

We are grateful to these small, family business owners who donate to keep our families together and close to the vital care their children require!

Next time you're at McDonald's be sure to say, "Thank You!"