Mandy Redfearn
My Ronald McDonald House Story

Mandy's story is one of receiving and then giving back through the years. Mandy and her husband, Kevin (a Facilities employee), once had a need to stay at a Ronald McDonald House (RMH) because of issues with their youngest daughter when she was born. Since that time, Mandy has organized a dinner for 50 people staying at the RMH Pensacola each year. The effort includes planning, fundraising, purchasing, preparing and serving. This has been accomplished with the assistance of the Controller’s department and other employees from building 20E/W. Additionally, she participates in the annual Kaps for Kids RMH campaign, selling t-shirts and caps but also accepting donations. This year, her effort has grown to be division-wide within the Division of Finance & Administration, using both volunteers and contributions to make dinner and purchase needed supplies for the RMH Pensacola. Mandy is a campus community member who is giving back and impacting the lives of others.

Following is her account of her RMH experience, in her words.

On the morning of Wednesday, May 10, 2006, I went to Baptist Hospital to have a scheduled C-Section for the birth of my youngest daughter, Amber. She was delivered and given to my husband, Kevin. He held her for a few minutes and the nurses took her to clean her up. I was taken to recovery.

I wasn’t in recovery long when Amber’s pediatrician came in and explained that he heard a heart murmur. He had contacted Sacred Heart Children’s Hospital to come pick her up because he wanted a pediatric cardiologist check her to ensure nothing else was wrong. The nurses wheeled me in my bed into the NICU and let me see Amber. I was not allowed to hold her. After a few minutes, they took me to a room and prepped Amber to be transported in a pediatric ambulance to Sacred Heart. My husband, his parents, and my parents left and went to Sacred Heart. My grandmother stayed with me.

My parents came back later that day to tell me Amber had Transposition of the Greater Arteries (TGA) and Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD). This meant that the two main arteries in Amber's heart were pumping the wrong blood to the wrong chambers and the VSD was two holes in her heart.

Unfortunately, the surgeons in Pensacola were not skilled in performing the surgery Amber’s condition required so she was flown to Orlando the next day. My husband and stepfather drove to Orlando to be with Amber. The caseworker assigned to us in Orlando handled all of the arrangements for Amber’s transport and contacted the Ronald McDonald House there to reserve a room. When my husband and step-dad arrived at the hospital, they were given a packet of information and sent to the Ronald McDonald House to check in and unload their luggage. The staff at RMH had their room ready.

During the next week, Kevin and David attended several CPR and car safety classes. They visited Amber as much as was allowed and fed her every chance they got. I remained in Baptist Hospital until Friday then went to my mom’s house. Kevin's parents had our older daughter, Michaela.

Following my release from the hospital, I had an allergic reaction to the tape that the doctor used when sewing me up. It was so bad that the doctor almost admitted me back to the
hospital. I was given a lot of strong medication and was not allowed to leave Pensacola until the reaction cleared up. I finally made it see Amber on the evening of Friday, May 19th. My mom had to drive me there. I was ecstatic to finally be able to hold Amber after a week and a half.

Amber had open-heart surgery to repair the TGA and VSD on Wednesday, May 17, prior to my arrival. She withstood the surgery well but had a minor setback afterwards. Every time the hospital staff removed the oxygen, Amber’s oxygen level dropped drastically. The doctors continued to keep her in the NICU. A week later, a motion x-ray was performed on Amber. The doctors found that a nerve in her diaphragm had been touched (probably during surgery) and was causing the right side of her diaphragm to be paralyzed. Stimulation therapy was begun on her at that time.

After seeing Amber, my mom and I met Kevin and David at the RMH where I met the staff and was given a tour. It was beautiful. The fee for a room was $16 per night. It was nice not having to pay an arm and leg for a hotel and being right next to the hospital.

At the time, RMH didn’t have breakfast or lunch provided daily like the RMH here in Pensacola, but dinner was provided. Now they have lunch and dinner provided when possible. It was nice to not have to worry about where we were going to eat dinner every night. We had Internet access, laundry facilities, living room, game room, a very large kitchen/dining area with our own place to keep food we purchased in the pantry or refrigerator. They also had a community pantry with food available to the houseguests. We could cook as long as we cleaned up and we cleaned our room before we checked out.

Every day the RMH staff wanted to know how Amber was doing. They enjoyed seeing pictures of her and hearing of her progress. It was very heart warming and gave us a feeling of family and community. After being in the hospital for three weeks, Amber was finally able to come home.

Since our experience at the RMH in Orlando, I have felt the calling to help our local RMH as much as possible. I have participated in the Kaps 4 Kids fundraising event each year. In May 2016 I organized a night for buildings 20E and 20W to provide dinner and am currently working on doing the same for April 2018. Not only do we provide dinner for the house, we buy supplies to donate to the house as well. I encourage everyone who is able to participate in this wonderful charity. The RMH operates strictly on donations. Any contribution of time, good, or funds is appreciated. This is my way of saying Thank You to the Ronald McDonald House Charities.