

BY RACHEL BEAIRD



For nearly 40 years, Ronald McDonald House® Dallas (RMHD) has served the community and helped more than 38,000 families. Just recently, RMHD has expanded its reach to Frisco with the opening of a family room at the new Texas Scottish Rite for Children Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Center.

Ronald McDonald House Charities® offers three core programs: houses, family rooms and care mobiles. Family rooms are the fastest-growing program out of Ronald McDonald House Charities. There are 249 Ronald McDonald family rooms worldwide and 137 in the U.S. Luckily for Frisco, Scottish Rite's new facility turned out to be the perfect spot for the Dallas area's very first family room. "If you have ever spent any amount of time at a hospital, then you know it is exhausting — mentally, physically and emotionally," says Ms. Jill Cumnock, the CEO of RMHD. "So, the whole premise behind a family room is that it is supposed to look, feel and smell different from the hospital. We want them to have that 'hanging out in your living room' feeling, so that while you are waiting for your child or loved one to get out of surgery, you are comfortable."

A typical family room offers sleeping rooms, shower facilities, Internet access, televisions, a kitchenette, books, games and, most importantly, a safe place to relax. They are typically near a neonatal or pediatric ICU because those tend to be the more serious cases where parents usually do not even want to leave the hospital for a moment. The new Scottish Rite facility is a pediatric day-surgery center, so this family room is a bit atypical since there is not really in-patient care, but it still offers all of the standard amenities (excluding sleeping rooms).

One very helpful feature of family rooms is that you can always find a staff member or volunteer eager to help you with anything you might need. Whether that means grabbing a cup

of coffee, playing a game with younger siblings or even just listening to you share what you are going through, they are there to do whatever they can to help you make that excruciating waiting experience just a little bit better. Ms. Cumnock spoke

with Dr. Karl Rathjen, the president of Scottish Rite's foundation, and learned that surgeons in particular are looking forward to the family room being able to help facilitate post-op discussions. "One thing that is really hard for surgeons is when they get done with surgery and then are trying to talk to parents about how the operation went and next steps, but they have their kids climbing all over them taking their focus," Ms. Cumnock says. "So, one great thing about family rooms is that this is a safe space where volunteers can watch siblings and keep them company while medical discussions take place outside so parents can give their undivided attention."

Since RMHD's inception in 1981, they have had a strong relationship with Scottish Rite. The two organizations have very similar cultures and RMHD already has many families with children being treated at Scottish Rite hospitals stay with them at their downtown location. RMHD hosts 1,400 families each year, but expects the family room will help serve roughly 1,000 additional people annually. "Scottish Rite has been phenomenal to work with. They have provided us with furniture and

really anything we could possibly need. I cannot think of a better partner for us to have hosting our first family room," Ms. Cumnock says. "I just love seeing how they take care of these kids and can truly say they do everything they can to better their lives."

The 345,000-square-foot sports medicine facility located at the corner of Lebanon Road and the Dallas North Tollway opened its doors mid-October. Shortly after, on November 2, there was a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the family room that was attended by both Ms. Cumnock and Mayor Jeff Cheney, as well as several members from the boards of both organizations.



OPEN House



Jill Cumnock, the CEO of Ronald McDonald House Dallas, is seen with Leigh-Ellen Norman of the Frisco Chamber of Commerce Ambassador Council.

The community watched with great pride. “We started serving families on November 12, but already we have had families in every single day,” Ms. Cumnock says. “This project is something that has been in the pipeline for years now and we are just so thrilled we have finally made it here.”

RMHD has long been working to implement a family room in a Dallas-area hospital, but it can be hard for large facilities to allocate space because it means taking away an existing waiting area that may not be able to be spared for even the length of construction. So, when Scottish Rite broke ground on their Frisco facility in 2016, it turned out to be the perfect opportunity for RMHD to be in on the construction plans. “I really cannot speak highly enough of Scottish Rite. They have just been so phenomenal to work with every step of the way and we are so grateful this has worked out,” Ms. Cumnock says. “We are also hopeful this family room will inspire other hospitals and facilities to want family rooms because, the truth is, people prefer hospitals that have amenities and above and beyond care like this.”

Aside from the support provided by the staff, parents can also find comfort and solace in being able to connect with other families going through something similar. Additionally, kids who are having surgery or seeking treatment have an opportunity to get to know someone around their age who may be sick as well. “When kids get sick or hurt, they can sometimes physically look different ... whether that means they are bald from chemo, suffering from severe burns or are there for a limb replacement. They may not look like your everyday six-year-old,” Ms. Cumnock explains. “But, at the RMHD house or a family room, they are normal. They do not stand out because there are other kids there just like them and they get to just be a normal kid again.”

The family room can comfortably accommodate 25 people and is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Anyone interested in volunteer opportunities or learning how to get involved with either the family room or the charity can visit rmhdallas.org for more information.

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