

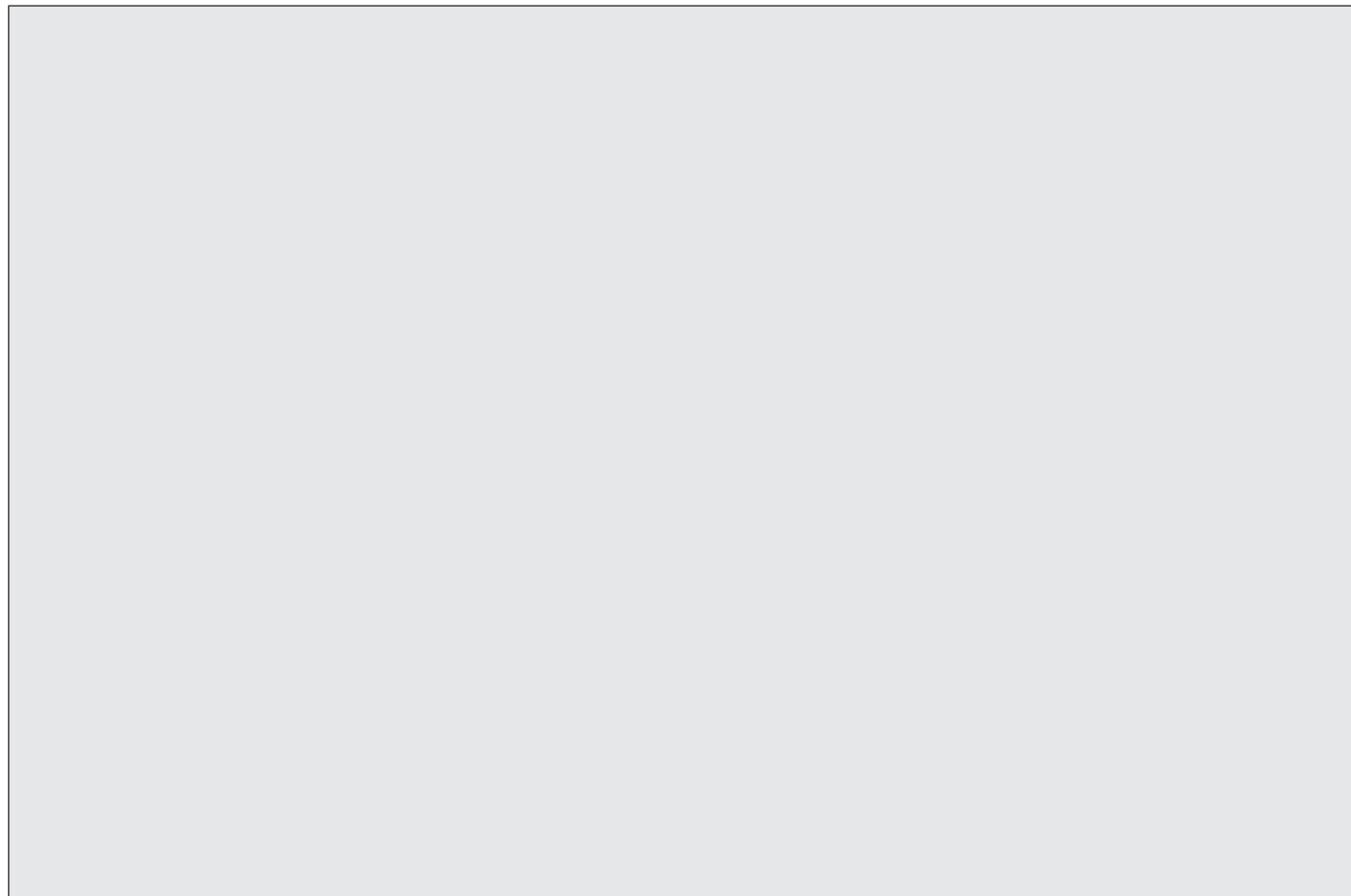
# Richmond's Rich History with the Ronald McDonald House Charity

By Jessica Hurst | Photos courtesy of the Ronald McDonald House Charity

For decades, Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) of Richmond has touched the lives of thousands of families in the Greater Richmond region. Offering essential comforts and a home-away-from-home to those in the most unthinkable situations, RMHC was born out of love and necessity.

In 1974, Philadelphia Eagles Tight End Fred Hill, found himself in one of those unthinkable situations when his 3-year-old daughter, Kim, was diagnosed with Leukemia. Fred and his wife camped out in the hospital, refusing to leave their young child alone along this journey. During their many sleepless days and nights spent in the waiting rooms and hallways of the hospital, they witnessed many other families suffering in the same ways that they were. Fred rallied his teammates to raise funds to help alleviate the strain on parents with severely ill children, not quite sure what that would ultimately look like. Moved by his efforts, Dr. Audrey Evans at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia collaborated to create the "house" element. In all, it was a joint effort between the Philadelphia Eagles, McDonald's, and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Coming later this month, "Audrey's Children", starring Natalie Dormer, will detail more the story of how RHMC was born. To date, RMHC has over 380 House programs in 62 countries.

*(Continues on next page)*





Children’s Hospital of Richmond at VCU, which provides a non-clinical space for families to have a meal or cup of coffee, find some space to relax and reset, or even just do some laundry. The space features four Sleep Rooms and is ideally intended for shorter stays, allowing families to stay close while their child receives critical medical care.

RMHC Richmond recently announced that they closed on the 1.6-acre plot in Jackson Ward, with plans to build a new 50-room, campus style Ronald McDonald House that offers 4 immuno-compromised suites. While RMHC Richmond will close their Ronald McDonald House on Monument Avenue when it opens the new facility, as early as 2027, the new space will allow a tremendous opportunity to aid many more families in crisis.

This transformational project is projected to cost \$40 million and has been in the works for eight years. It is the largest campaign RMHC Richmond has ever seen. The project is progressing under the watchful eye of Emily Toalson, CEO of RMHC Richmond. Emily spent years working with the Children’s Hospital Foundation, helping them raise the funds for the new hospital. That experience allowed her firsthand exposure to RMHC Richmond and their operation. Since becoming RMHC Richmond’s new CEO, she has quickly focused on securing the land and collaborating with her team to raise the funds needed to turn this vision into reality. Under her leadership, they’ve already secured \$15.35 million for the project, with additional funds on the way.

Many people are surprised to learn that RMHC Richmond’s services extend beyond providing temporary housing to families in medical crisis. The 45-year-old organization has programs that address a variety of areas of need. Many families are displaced miles from their homes and may not have access to a vehicle. RMHC Richmond offers transportation services to help them get around in a new city. We all know that when your child faces illness, your mind shifts focus, and simple things can feel insurmountable. RMHC Richmond provides laundry services to take that one small thing off their minds. It’s incredible what a difference it can make to have clean, fresh clothes. They also work with meal volunteers to offer Lunches with Love, a free lunch service that they provide to families at nearby hospitals.

RMHC Richmond became the 16th RMHC chapter 45 years ago when it opened the Ronald McDonald House on Monument Avenue in April of 1980. The House features nine rooms, with one handicap-accessible room. RMHC Richmond reserves hotel rooms with handicap accessibility for families when that room is occupied.

For many years, Richmond has been a growing hub for pediatric healthcare, resulting in an increased demand for space in the city’s Ronald McDonald Houses. To help alleviate the growing need, RMHC Richmond brought home to the hospital. In 2023, the organization opened a 3,300 sq ft in-hospital Ronald McDonald House at the

