The Benalcazar family from Illinois shares their story of how a diagnosis of retinoblastoma brought them to New York City.
Ronald McDonald House New York provides a temporary “home-away-from-home” for pediatric cancer patients and their families. The House is a supportive and caring environment which encourages and nurtures the development of child-to-child and parent-to-parent support systems. Ronald McDonald House New York is the largest facility of its type in the world.
We can’t think of a better way to kick off the summer season than with a giant thank you to individuals and organizations who have contributed of their resources to help fulfill our Wish List requests.

Ronald McDonald House New York gratefully acknowledges Bloomberg’s for their donation of blankets, towels, sheets, pillowcases, and mattress pads. We would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Bed Bath & Beyond for their donation of toasters and coffee makers to help get our families started in the morning.

Costco Wholesale, Fairway Market and Food Emporium have all come through with gift card donations that have helped to accommodate a wide range of needs.

Correction note: In our Winter 2011 issue, we thanked State News for its generous donation of party supplies, however we misspelled a name. Ms. Rosie Weisbart, we are very grateful for your contribution and thank you for your support.

For more information, visit our “Wish List” page at www.rmhnyny.org/wishlist.
What’s New at Your House? Macy’s Living Room

With the spring season considered to be a time of new beginnings and new growth occurring, the very familiar space of our Macy’s Living Room is no exception. This past May, the living room underwent a major renovation that resulted in our families having a fresh, new space to enjoy while staying at Ronald McDonald House New York.

The living room was previously renovated in 2016, with Macy’s providing a space that was more conducive to relaxation, and a look that reflected the room’s personality as the heart of family life at Ronald McDonald New York. This time around, families staying at the facility will be introduced to a new space, made possible thanks to a generous donation of more than $75,000 in donated furniture and design services.

The relationship with the Macy’s and Bloomingdale’s family began when Tina Lundgren, who joined the Ronald McDonald House New York Board of Directors in 2007, began to volunteer on behalf of the House. Together with her husband Terry, who serves as the CEO, president and chairman of the Macy’s Board, the Lundgrens’ commitment brought a new standard of comfort and style to families staying at the House.

Macy’s embraced our vision of providing relaxation, and a look that reflected the room’s personality as the heart of family life at Ronald McDonald New York.

This time around, families staying at the House will be introduced to a new space to enjoy while staying at Ronald McDonald New York.

Photos by Marian Goldman

Spotlight on Your Board

Tell us about your involvement with the annual gala and fundraising for the House.

That’s really a way that I’m able to be very helpful to the House in the sense that my interaction with a number of the financial service firms has grown as our business has grown. I’m actually excited to talk to them about contributing and supporting the event. My involvement with the annual gala also is one where Stanley and I might have some longstanding relationships with the Wall Street community, and they’ve been incredibly supportive, and it’s important for us to continue that relationship. So one of the ways that I’ve attempted to continue that relationship is to continue to introduce some of the newer and younger Wall Street’s supported talent.

Rack Martin, Bill Sullivan and myself have tried to make at least an annual party or get-together at the House for some of these younger, newer Wall Street employees so that they can see first-hand what some of their older, more experienced colleagues have seen, and just to continue that relationship between Ronald McDonald House and Wall Street.

When introducing members of the financial community to the House and its mission, describe the initial reaction/feedback.

I try to do an on-site visit or tour. That’s always been the most impactful on me, and it seems to be the most impactful on anyone else. Because, like I said, [potential volunteers] see how important the House is to these families, but at the same time, they see immense appreciation from the families. When you spend time at the House, it’s also inspiring in the sense that you don’t see people walking around moping, you see people walking around with a smile on their face. And that’s actually become a little bit of a life lesson where we all have some headwinds at times, and then when you go to the House and you see how people are encountering their head-winds, or issues, or challenges — there’s a lot of different angles that a visit to the House gives you, but to me they’re all positive and it’s almost addicting — the more you become involved and helpful.

What would you say to encourage others to get involved with the House; whether as a fundraiser host, or as a volunteer?

I would encourage others to get involved by just bringing a friend or a family member of the House to observe the amazing facility. It starts at a Board meeting where there’s some very seasoned and senior business people on the Board. They are as intense about the organization as they are about their everyday lives andunte it’s just as intense about the organization. It’s addicting every which way, but to me, just touching and feeling it firsthand is always the best.
Kids Helping Kids

Leadership & Giving

The generosity that these young people display through their works is an excellent indicator of their extraordinary leadership capability. It’s always wonderful to introduce the House to a potential volunteer; especially seeing how each person makes a connection on a unique level. For our younger donors and volunteers, the experience is even more rewarding to see the ways in which they apply their creative minds to everything that they do.

From spearheading school fundraising drives, to hosting lemonade stands, to donating bar/bat mitzvah and birthday party gifts, our area youth have found many ways to generously help their peers at Ronald McDonald House New York.

Pop Tabs

With new green initiatives helping us to save the planet, it’s now easier than ever to also give hope to a child battling cancer at the same time. Children and their families are sponsoring school-wide pop tab drives: collecting donations of the metal pieces located on top of soda cans and sending them to Ronald McDonald House New York. This activity not only helps to save the Earth, but it also raises much-needed awareness about how one individual’s contribution can make a difference for a child battling cancer. Now, in addition to Pop Tabs, Ronald McDonald House New York is also collecting as part of its recycling campaign. Before you discard unwanted keys, consider donating them to Ronald McDonald House New York. For more information about how you can donate pop tabs and old keys, contact the Development Office at (212) 639-0100, or visit www.rmh-newyork.org.

Penny Harvest

The power of one can have a major impact, especially during the springtime Penny Harvest season! Ronald McDonald House New York is pleased to recognize the many schools throughout New York City that mobilized their student leadership boards to encourage the spirit of giving. As the “Kids of the Roundtable” at Manhattan’s PS. 187, or the “Common Cents Roundtable” at Walter Kassenbrock Elementary School (PS. 185) in Brooklyn, the Newton Caregivers at Isaac Newton Middle School in Manhattan, and the Busy Bees at PS. 53 in the Bronx have demonstrated, spare change can go a long way in the life of a child staying at the House.

Kids Charity Fun Run

Every year in November, just one week after the ING New York City Marathon, students from all over the tri-state area come together to participate in a special sporting event in the heart of Central Park. More than 25 schools come together to participate to show their support for children battling pediatric cancer. For more information on how you can participate or support our next Kids Fun Run event on Saturday, November 12, contact Anthony Cardello at (212) 639-0100, or visit www.rmh-newyork.org for more information.

The Benalcazar Family Discusses Their Battle with Retinoblastoma

When Naperville, Illinois parents Brenda and Fernando Benalcazar received the devastating diagnosis that their eight-month-old daughter had retinoblastoma, they had no idea of the radical changes that their lives would go through in just 24 hours — or the effect that the experience would have on both of their children.

Retinoblastoma is a type of cancer that develops in the light-sensitive tissue that lines the back of the eye. The condition is typically diagnosed in children two years and younger. An earlier diagnosis leads to a greater likelihood of beating the illness. Sarah’s mother first noticed something wasn’t right when she saw a glassy reflection in Sarah’s eye. Family photographs later showed that Sarah’s left eye had a type of white (as opposed to red-eye) reflection.

“In certain light it would reflect and it would look really glassy, kind of like a cat’s eye. And that’s textbook for retinoblastoma,” said Mrs. Benalcazar. “I noticed when I was taking photographs that there was a white reflection. And it only came from one of her eyes; that’s because I think it was over her line of vision and the optical nerve. But it would always show up in pictures. It wasn’t until we got to the pediatric ophthalmologist that I found out it was in both eyes. But the one in the left eye was almost as big as her eye.”

Cancer Affects the Entire Family

Over the next 24 hours, the Benalcazars would rush Sarah to a specialist, while her older brother Joshua, now 6, would need to undergo his own screening for the condition (Joshua was immediately determined to be cancer-free).

When the family relocated after months of treatment at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago, they would all make the move to Ronald McDonald House New York.

“Joshua, Sarah’s older brother was also deeply affected by Sarah’s illness, becoming introverted and frightened by his sister’s experience and by leaving his home and friends behind in Chicago,” said Chaplain Cheryl P. Ferris, Ronald McDonald House New York’s director of Family Support.

Working with doctors at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Sarah underwent three rounds of a breakthrough treatment called “intra-arterial chemotherapy,” a method that allows oncologists to take a more targeted approach toward eradicating the cancer, while the patient experiences fewer side effects like vomiting, fever and hair loss.

It was effective, but after a year and a half, it wasn’t enough to save her eye. On February 15th, the Benalcazars received the devastating news that the cancer in Sarah’s eye was spreading too rapidly, and it would need to be removed. The surgery was performed on February 28th.

“The day after her surgery, she woke up and she was a different child,” recalled Mrs. Benalcazar. “Sarah was energetic, more talkative, she wasn’t complaining about headaches anymore — she was just happy.”

At two-years-old, Sarah received her first prosthetic eye on April 12th. She’s gone through multiple fittings since.

Adjusting to Their New Home for the Time Being

As Sarah went through changes with her treatment, her brother Joshua was deeply affected. Joshua saw less of his mother and sister because most of their time was spent in treatment. When the family moved to New York City, things changed for the better. Not long after the family received the news about Sarah’s eye in February, the
The Benalcazar Family (continued)

Benalcazars began to adapt to what would be their new home for the next few months. Through a partnership with the local Department of Education, our Programs Department was able to enroll Joshua in a local school. Sarah was later enrolled into a program at the nearby Church of the Epiphany Day School.

"Having never been to a Ronald McDonald House, I didn’t know what to expect. I was pleasantly surprised to see that they had a full play room. Joshua met the other kids, he got involved in activities, and he felt comfortable,” said Mrs. Benalcazar.

“One of the things that I especially like about here is that I was worried that Joshua wasn’t going to be included because he’s a sibling. I thought they were just going to focus on Sarah because she has cancer. But they were treated equally. So whether you have cancer, or you’re a sibling, you’re included. Joshua loves Christine; he loves to do “Weird Science,” and now he’s into the iPad. He went to camp last year, and he’s looking forward to camp this year.”

“Working together with the Benalcazar family we were able to help Joshua adjust and feel more at ease in his new environment. When the family first arrived from Chicago, the children were both afraid of the therapy dogs that work in our facility. Now, they pet and play with them and enjoy their interactions. Joshua especially likes all animals and takes pleasure in watching the fish in our fish tanks, as well as holding the leashes and walking our therapy dogs,” added Chaplain Frei. “It’s so nice to see the positive changes both children have made after facing a life-threatening illness together as a family.”

The Benalcazars are currently staying in New York City near to the House. Sarah is on a rotation where she sees the doctor for her right eye every two months. During the summer, both Sarah (she just recently made the three-year-old age of eligibility) and her brother and enrolled in this year’s Camp Ronald McDonald. Mr. Benalcazar began a new project in the New York City area, working as a general contractor. Meanwhile, the family will continue to focus on their healing. The Benalcazars are still unsure as to what next steps will be for Sarah’s treatment, but what they do know is that the support, love and caring of their family at Ronald McDonald House New York is nearby.

Community Snapshots

At the home-away-from-home for families coming from all of the world in their battle against cancer, our “community” is a broad one. Here are a few highlights of some of the people who have recently touched our hearts at Ronald McDonald House New York.

Summer Hoedown with RBC Capital Markets

It was the first day of June, and RBC Capital Markets had the best idea in mind to celebrate the summer season. With a live band and line dancing, families staying at Ronald McDonald House New York had a real hoedown of a time with our Wednesday night volunteers. As Board member Robert “Bobby” Grubert says, the RBC Capital Markets folks “put on a pretty good spread.” It’s always a pleasure to see Bobby, Jennifer Hadari, and John “Jeb” Beckwith in the House!

Photos by Natalie Greaves
Community Snapshots (continued)

David Wright Foundation 5th Annual Las Vegas Night
It was a night full of heavy hitters and high rollers at Bridgewater’s at South Street Seaport during Mets Third Baseman David Wright’s annual fundraiser. A generous donor who has supported our Adopt-a-Room program, Mr. Wright held “Las Vegas Night” to raise funds to sponsor a room at the House.

Opera for Humanity
The night couldn’t have been more beautiful, but the uplifting voices of Opera for Humanity made it that much more amazing. With a recital benefit held at the Liederkrantz Club on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, the organization raised more than $5,000 to help support House Operations. Here are Opera for Humanity’s Director of Public Relations Linda Platter, Director of Development Suzanne Halsea, and Founder Amy Shoremont visiting with Ronald McDonald House New York’s President & CEO William T. Sullivan, Director of Development Richard Martin, and Volunteer Director Helen Stafford.

MVP-Medicine Via Philanthropy Fundraiser at Yankee Stadium
The June 25th MVP-Medicine Via Philanthropy Fundraiser at Yankee Stadium was a huge home run with our families, thanks to Dr. Thomas Haveron and his team. Naming Ronald McDonald House New York as its community partner, the event featured guest appearances by celebrity Yankees players Robinson Cano and Francisco Cervelli and retired New York Giants legend Karl Nelson. The event raised more than $90,000, with a portion of the proceeds to benefit the House.

Kids Kicking Cancer Beltling Ceremony
If there’s anyone who can kick cancer’s butt, look no further than the students of our weekly Kids Kicking Cancer (KKC) classes. On Friday, June 17, KKC’s New York City Program Director Angela Babin held a belting ceremony in the Macy’s Living Room where our students showed off their moves and advanced to the next level. Power. Peace. Purpose. The event truly empowered all in attendance.

In Memoriam
In March, Ronald McDonald House New York said farewell to a dear friend and supporter, Nicholas LaPorte, Jr. A former Executive Director of the Associated Builders and Owners of Greater New York, and an appointee to the city Civil Service Commission, Mr. LaPorte was a very generous supporter of our mission. Through his help, Ronald McDonald House New York was able to get our families on the road to better health. His fundraising efforts helped to enhance our free transportation program tremendously by replacing our one aging van with two brand new state of the art “Turtle Top” vehicles. These vans can be seen through New York City, providing service to our 13 partner hospitals. Mr. LaPorte’s energetic leadership, and dedication will be greatly missed.

Community Snapshots (continued)
**Summer Music Never Sounded So Sweet — New York Summer Music Festival**

As if the summer fun couldn’t get any better, the New York Pops and its Director of Education Sherrrie Maricle, Ph.D., are showing our young musicians a new way to reach new heights in the perfection of their craft.

Five students from Ronald McDonald House New York have been selected to receive scholarships to attend the New York Summer Music Festival, a six-week program being held at SUNY College at Ossining. This will be our third year of participation in the program.

While students attend in two-week modules, their experience will take place in a challenging, yet nurturing environment where they’ll be allowed to collaborate with other young musicians from around the world.

Students arrive on-campus and sign up for the classes of greatest interest to them, and for the next two weeks, they get to enjoy eight hours of music instruction that include a focus on history and technology.

Much like picking college classes, students sign up for whatever interests them most. Faculty instructors will include a few familiar faces such as Dr. Maricle herself, along with New York Pops music director Matt Davis, Brenda Earle, and Robert Sabin.

Students jam during a concert every day, and everyone ships in the large choir of approximately 300 people. Performance opportunities span jazz, chamber, orchestra ensembles, chorus, and band.

At the end of the day’s instruction, students participate in leisure activities that include lake trips and baseball games. Their two-week stay will culminate in a major performance.

Ronald McDonald House New York wishes the best of luck to our young performers. To learn more about the New York Summer Music Festival, visit www.nysmf.org.

**“I Will Always Be There” is Now Available on iTunes**

If you were in attendance at our annual gala event in May, you’ll recall seeing a live performance of “I Will Always Be There,” a moving presentation given by our families alongside the talented musicians of The New York Pops.

Now available on iTunes, the band and chorus of Ronald McDonald House New York have “put to wax” their collective feelings of love, support and perseverance in their fight against pediatric cancer.

Have you checked out our music education program? Through a partnership with the New York Pops, children staying at Ronald McDonald House New York receive world-class instruction in instruments and voice. For the latest highlights on this and our other educational programs, visit us on Facebook and Twitter.

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**Camp Ronald McDonald**

School’s out! And that means that camp is definitely in at Ronald McDonald House New York.

Once again led by Camp Director and Program Associate Ben Winsten, this year’s Camp Ronald McDonald experience includes more than 20 trips to some of the most fascinating hotspots throughout New York City. Most everyone can recall their memories of summer camp: the field trips, arts and crafts, and camaraderie.

Camp Ronald McDonald is free and open to all residents (including siblings) of the House, ages three and above. Children of staff members are also eligible to attend Wednesday July 6th marked the first day of camp, and the Programs Department introduced it with a new look in the Playroom.

In addition to our usual jaunts to explore the delights of deep sea fishing, summer camp participants will also go kayaking on the Hudson River, learn how to fly at Trapeze School New York, spend a little time with Archie and Friends at the headquarters of Archie Comics Publications, and explore the Greenburgh Nature Center on the Green at Citi Field (home of the NY Mets).

Are you exhausted yet? Well, we’ve only just begun. Be sure to check out our Facebook and Twitter pages for updates on Camp Ronald McDonald and other activities.

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The Tree of Life

As our stories continue to add new detail to the rich history of Ronald McDonald House New York, the Tree of Life wall sculpture continues to flourish with new leaf additions. The financial support generated for Ronald McDonald House New York from the Tree of Life enables us to offer more than just a place to sleep when families travel to New York City for their child's cancer treatment. Like a tree, the House provides shelter, has many branches of support and gives strength in times of turmoil. The Tree is a home-away-from-home, a place with an extended family and life-long friendships with those who are there when you need them.

Leaves are engraved with a message and the name of the honored person. Each leaf may be purchased for $2,500. Your leaf will be placed on The Tree of Life and you will receive a beautiful glass tile to acknowledge the installation of the leaf in your loved one's name. Your generosity is greatly appreciated and will help us continue to offer services to families arriving tomorrow and in the years ahead.

For more information or to purchase a leaf, please contact Richard Martin, Director of Development at (212) 639-0206, or rmartin@rmh-newyork.org.

Giving the United Way

Do you participate in the United Way, Combined Federal Campaign, CUNY Campaign for Voluntary Charitable Giving, Municipal Combined Campaign or NYS Employees Federal Appeal at work? Please consider "donor designating" a gift to Ronald McDonald House New York. The following codes can be used: Tri-State United Way #003447; NYC Combined Federal Campaign #00106; United Way of New York City #0610; or use email at rmartin@rmh-newyork.org.

The Vivian Harris Society

Ronald McDonald House® New York created its Vivian Harris Society to honor our late President Emeritus Vivian Harris. During her 26-year tenure as founding President of Ronald McDonald House New York, Vivian nurtured our families and inspired staff and volunteers. She was a tireless and gracious leader with innovative vision.

The members of the Vivian Harris Society embody Vivian’s triumphant spirit by recognizing the House in their estate plans or retirement plans, and we invite you to join those members by considering us in your future planning. We invite you to join our Vivian Harris Society by making a gift to the House in your Estate or Retirement Plan.

If you are moved by the idea of becoming a member of the Vivian Harris Society, please contact Richard Martin, Director of Development, at (212) 639-0206 or via email at rmartin@rmh-newyork.org. Mr. Martin will discuss how to arrange a gift that best fits the needs of your own beneficiaries, your goals for asset protection, generational wealth transfer, along with tax-saving implications, and a gift to the House. A discussion never places you under obligation.

The Tree of Life • Spring 2011

The Tree of Life • Spring 2011

Giving the United Way

Double the Impact of Your Gift!

A matching gift from your employer will help to make an even bigger difference in the lives of families staying at Ronald McDonald House New York. In fact, your company’s match may be as much as 100% percent! Visit us at www.mh-newyork.org and use our matching gift tool to see if your employer is among thousands of NYC companies that have already enrolled.

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Calendar of Events

Save the Date

An Evening of Cabaret,
Feinstein’s at Loews Regency
September 26, 2011
6:30pm
Feinstein’s at Loews Regency
540 Park Ave at 61st St.

Fourth Annual Block Party
October 1, 2011 (Rain Date: October 2, 2011)
11AM – 5:30PM
East 73rd Street between First and York Avenues

“Children’s Happy Faces
Foundation” Annual Golf Outing and Trump National Golf Club
October 4, 2011
9:00am Golf Registration
Sleepy Hollow Country Club and Trump National Golf Club
Briarcliff Manor, NY

NYC Marathon, Team Ronald McDonald
November 6, 2011
6:00AM
Transportation from Ronald McDonald House of New York

Kids Charity Fun Run
November 12, 2011
10:00AM
Central Park, 5th Avenue at 59th Street, follow signs.

Fourth Annual Block Party
Join us on Saturday, October 1, for a day of fun, food, and fellowship as we celebrate our fourth annual Block Party! Part-street fair, and part-festival, the event is an experience like no other in New York City. Spend a day with us filled with local treats from your favorite restaurants, and a little international flair thanks to the families at Ronald McDonald House New York. The 2011 Block Party is sponsored by Hess Corporation; Century Management Services, Inc.; Hercules Laundry Corporation; and Efficient Combustion. Additional support also provided by the NYPD’s 19th Precinct and FDNY. Enjoy games, rides, great shopping and great fun right at home with Ronald McDonald House New York! Admission is free, and open to the public. For more information, visit www.rmh-newyork.org, or call (212) 639-0100.

Kids Charity Fun Run
To find out where the biggest hearts reside in New York City, one needs look no further than the city’s young philanthropists. On Saturday, November 12, children from public and parochial schools throughout the tri-state area will participate in the 13th Annual Kids’ Fun Run, with proceeds from the event to benefit Ronald McDonald House New York. Admission is free, and open to the public. For more information, visit www.rmh-newyork.org, or call (212) 639-0100.

“Hogs for Hope” Raises More than $19,000
More than 150 Harleys took to the streets of Westchester County for a beautiful day’s ride in support of families battling pediatric cancer. On Sunday, June 5th, the third annual “Hogs for Hope” motorcycle event kicked off in front of New Roc Harley Davidson. Chaired by Ken Geiger of the Yonkers Fire Department, with additional sponsorship by New Roc Harley Davidson, Comerica Bank, New Roc Harley Davidson, and Yonkers Motorcycle Club, the event successfully raised more than $19,000.

With the sun shining on their backs, the riders rode through the streets of Westchester raising awareness for the families, and returned to New Roc Harley to a cookout that featured a pig roast and eight different types of chili prepared by the members of the Yonkers Fire Department. Live entertainment was also provided while Ronald McDonald paid a visit to join in the festivities.

Additional highlights from the day included appearances by Ronald McDonald House New York families, and legendary actor (“True Lies,” “Gone in Sixty Seconds,” “Enemy of the State”) and martial artist (Chuck Zito, spent the day, bringing along the original Harley from “Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man.”

“Hogs for Hope” is just another great way for the Yonkers community at-large to help our families in a creative and fun way.”

Thank you to our riders, sponsors, volunteers and other event participants who helped to make the day so special.

Photos by Thomas F. Murphy Jr.

More than 150 Harley owners and riders participated on behalf of Ronald McDonald House New York

New Roc Harley Davidson Owner Jack Meskunas holds up a gift of thanks from Ronald McDonald House New York

Event Chairman Ken Geiger with Ronald McDonald House New York CEO William Sullivan, and Yonkers Fire Department’s John Savarese

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You’re invited!

Ronald McDonald House New York’s 4th Annual Block Party

Saturday, October 1, 2011
11 AM – 5:30 PM
East 73rd Street (between First and York Avenues)

Part-street fair, and part-festival, the event is an experience like no other in New York City. Join us for a day of fun, food and fellowship at our annual block party event! Event is free and open to the public.

(Rain Date: October 2, 2011)