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## Family centered care: Going beyond the hospital walls

For over 32 years, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado has served families across Southern Colorado and beyond with free temporary housing where families could be near their critically ill child. On Feb. 14, 1987, the first Southern Colorado Ronald McDonald House opened its doors in what was originally a tuberculosis sanatorium a century ago. It was lovingly dubbed “the house that love built” in recognition of its Valentine’s Day debut.

As the population of Colorado Springs grew, increased specialty pediatric and neonatal intensive care unit services followed. Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado embarked on the design of a new, larger house on the campus of the new Children’s Hospital of Colorado to serve ever-increasing



**Paul Reu, AIA**  
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Architects

requests for temporary housing from across Southern Colorado as well as from families in neighboring states who travel to Colorado Springs for their child’s care. After a careful design process and a successful capital fundraising campaign, the new RMH opened in August. At 25,000 square feet, it doubles the capacity of the former RMH and will be able to serve 650 families annually while continuing to make families the center of their critically ill child’s medical journey.

• **Rest, respite and connections are critical.** The

programs offered by Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado offer much more than accommodation. They provide a place to rest, meals, activities, peer support, support for siblings, respite, laundry facilities, among many other services so that parents are able to focus more fully on their critically ill child and the child’s care.

The entry and reception areas of the new RMH open to several comfortable sitting areas and a double-sided fireplace. Meals that Mend, the evening community meals prepared by volunteers, are served in large kitchen and dining room so that families can come together at the end of a long day.

A key focus of the new RMH was to provide a place of respite for families to re-energize away from the busy hospital environment where their child is receiving treatment. Key design considerations included separating sleeping areas, apart from the administrative and common activity areas. The entire facility is designed to be accessible to serve family members who may be otherwise challenged due to their physical abilities.

The well-appointed family suites in the new RMH were designed to facilitate respite with views of Pikes Peak and the Front Range with access on each floor to laundry facilities and supplies. On the upper floor, a second full kitchen allows families to prepare a private meal or grab a snack from the stocked pantry.

• **Spaces for siblings.** There was also a desire for the new RMH to include more activity spaces for siblings, from toddlers to teens. Older siblings can play video games or air hockey in the teen room. In the quiet living room, parents can keep a close eye on younger children in the play room, viewable through a large



The new Southern Colorado Ronald McDonald House was constructed on the campus of the new Children’s Hospital in Colorado Springs so families could be close to their critically ill child. Family suites in the west-facing areas of the new House also provide incredible views of Pikes Peak.



Well-appointed suites provide families much-needed respite apart from the busy hospital environment where their critically ill child is receiving care.



Comfortable sitting areas and a double-sided fireplace allow families space to connect and relax.

### Project Team

**Architect:** RTA Architects

**Civil Engineering:** Classic Consulting Engineers & Surveyors

**Structural Engineering:** HCDA Engineering

**Landscape Architecture:** Timberline Landscaping and NES Landscape Architects

**Mechanical, Plumbing and Electrical Engineering:** Plant Engineering Consultants

**General Contractor:** Colarelli Construction

window. Outside, siblings can burn off plenty of energy in the outdoor play area and basketball half-court while parents relax on the patio, enjoy the incredible view of Pikes Peak or use the barbeque grill to prepare a meal.

Beth Alessio, executive director of the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Southern Colorado, summed up the impact of the new House and its design, “The design of the new House has allowed such a greater depth of opportunity to support the diverse needs of our families and our community. (The architect) did a most

amazing job developing each space to be immediately welcoming and comforting and accessible to the families, something that was very important to our mission. In our first 30 days of operation, we have had six families with accessibility needs, something our old House could have never supported. Our new Ronald McDonald House made our dreams a reality – reaching the needs of our families, removing financial worries, and ultimately allowing families the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate so they can focus on their child’s health and well-being.” ▲