

Exceptional Care

Two incredible local organizations provide a home away from home in the time of need for families experiencing sickness and death

RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE OF THE GREATER HUDSON VALLEY

Christina Riley is the Executive Director of Ronald McDonald House of the Greater Hudson Valley, which provides families with children facing medical challenges an atmosphere of comfort, hope, and courage while keeping them close to necessary care and resources. “When a child is battling a medical crisis, Ronald McDonald House eases some of the burdens their families face every day,” says Riley. Located on the campus of Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, the House has 12 bedrooms that are filled to capacity almost every night, and provides meals, laundry, and respite services for families whose child is receiving treatment at the neighboring Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital.

In May 2020, Ronald McDonald House of the Greater Hudson Valley will celebrate a decade of keeping families together, and close to the medical

care their child needs. To help mark the ten-year anniversary, several organizations have teamed up to remodel the family common spaces. One Room Wonders, Bjorn Bjornsson Design and Smart D2 Playrooms have begun working on plans to give the kitchen, great room, and playroom much needed updates and improved functionality. “We’re excited to celebrate this milestone with a remodel of these spaces, and look forward to continuing our mission of supporting many more families for years to come,” says Riley.

Since its opening in 2011, more than 2,000 families have called the Ronald McDonald House of the Greater Hudson Valley their home, and the House has saved families over \$5,000,000 in out-of-pocket lodging and meal costs. Says Riley, “we give families what they need most during this critical time – each other.”



The Atkins family spent a month at the RMHouse last year. They were excited to take their newborn son, Justin, home for the first time in November. Justin was born during his sisters recovery and came home to the Ronald McDonald House upon discharge from the hospital. Justin’s older sister, Charlie, was involved in a traumatic event that left her lower leg amputated. The family was flown down from their home in Sullivan County upon the incident, when mom was 38 weeks pregnant. The family expressed their gratitude for giving them a “home base” during this chaotic time.

REGIONAL HOSPICE CENTER FOR COMFORT CARE & HEALING/ THE NORTH STAR PAVILLION

“Twenty years ago, I took care of a woman who was dying of end stage breast cancer. She was only 42-years old. She had three teenage daughters and her husband had predeceased her the year prior of a heart attack on a basketball court.” Cynthia Emiry Roy, MS, LCSW, CHA, and Regional Hospice President and CEO since 2007, speaks steadily and factually, with the poise and professionalism of a natural leader and yet with such heartfelt emotion you can’t help but hang on every word. It’s clear she cares deeply about what she does, how she does it, and for whom. Roy averts her eyes up to the side as she reminisces, seemingly reaching for a tucked away memory that’s likely one of several hundred she’ll never forget throughout her two decades in healthcare.

“This woman desperately needed end of life care, and I had nowhere to send her. You can’t put a 42-year old in a nursing home,” says Roy. “She didn’t want to die in a hospital or at home in front of her children. It would have been the right thing for her daughters to see her receiving care somewhere supportive and compassionate, and for them to be able to say goodbye to her and leave the death of their mother in that space. She became the inspiration behind The Center for Comfort Care & Healing.”



Nestled against a backdrop of wooded green on a cozy cul-de-sac in Danbury, Connecticut, just over the Westchester border and situated befittingly on Milestone Road, is where you’ll find Regional Hospice and its acclaimed Center for Comfort Care & Healing. It’s the first hospice residence of its kind in the State and a final home to patients from every corner of the Country, with 50% of its patients hailing from Westchester County. Stately yet intimate, anchored by meticulously manicured gardens and an interdisciplinary team of APRNs, RNs, CNAs, social workers and chaplains, the Center is seemingly quiet from the outside, but is bustling inside with life...and death. It’s a purposeful juxtaposition - as staff, volunteers and families alike await an inevitable end while celebrating and nurturing the life of a loved one.



If a place could perfectly represent its name, the Center for Comfort Care & Healing is it. There is healing here - not of the body, but of the soul. Complementary therapies include massage, reiki, aromatherapy, and a pet partner program in addition to emotional, spiritual, and volunteer support for each one of the Center’s rotating 12 resident patients, who can range in age from infancy to the elderly.

EXCEPTIONAL CARE

There is comfort here - not just the oddly comforting feeling of the unknown becoming the known, but the comfort of a home away from home. Residents enjoy private suites, sunny communal spaces, and chef-prepared custom meals served on porcelain plates. There's even an outdoor playground for the young ones and, on occasion, the young at heart who need to feel less like a grown-up, just for a little bit. Most importantly, there is care here - not only the kind you'd expect from the hands of trained medical professionals, but also the kind that comes from their hearts.

"When I was a teenager, my very best friend, Lesley, my soulmate, the person who was the kind of person you couldn't live without, died of leukemia," says Roy. "In some of Lesley's last days, all she wanted was to sit outside - and yet her care wouldn't allow for that. I vowed from then on to be instrumental in making a difference in the way we view and manage hospice care." Roy, who is recognized as an expert in end-of-life care for the last 23 years, assisted with reinventing the state of Connecticut regulations for hospice inpatient care, and had the 36,000-square-foot Center built under the 2012 revised best practice regulations.

Regional Hospice is more than a place - it's a philosophy, according to Roy, by which those with terminal illness and their loved ones are cared for and empowered through the end-of-life experience that honors the path of all hospice patients, whether they receive care offsite or reside at the Center. Regional Hospice provides bereavement support for families and community members, and also a range of support services for families whose babies or children have been diagnosed with terminal conditions or have died. The hospice team can accompany families throughout the journey of pregnancy, labor, birth, life, and remembrance. Within the Center's local communities, close to 360 children under the age of seventeen die each year from terminal illness.

"One of the most important things for us to remember through a child's time here is that they're just a kid, and they need to be a kid for as long as they can," says Christine Mastropietro, RN, CHPPN, Regional Hospice Pediatric Hospice Educator. "We are privileged to try and make it their best day ever, every day."



This "every moment counts" approach to care led Roy to Regional Hospice's next endeavor:

The North Star Pavilion, which will become the only dedicated residential hospice for babies and children in the Northeast, and one of only five in the country.

"The children that come here to live out their last days, whether 5-months old or 15-years old, are deserving of experiences that make them feel safe, stimulated, and special," says Roy. The North Star is set to change the landscape of hospice care for the non-profit organization's youngest patients in the most magical of ways. Children can stargaze under planetarium ceilings in their private suites, of which the pavilion will have four, or spend time outdoors with Mother Nature, meandering on woodland paths or enjoying rooftop gardens.

Having recently launched its capital campaign for the North Star, Regional Hospice is almost 1/4 of the way towards their goal of \$12-15 million with ambitions to break ground in October of this year. "We chose the name North Star because it's the North Star that provides guidance, companionship, and serves as a beacon for those who have lost their way," says Roy. "The North Star will be a space that serves the same purpose for its patients: to comfort, share hope, and be a guide that leads them to their eternal home."

This is not the hospice you had in mind.

Thank goodness.

Most of us probably think of a hospice as a dark, depressing place where people go to die.

The Regional Hospice Center for Comfort Care & Healing is nothing like that. Nothing like that, at all.

It is a gorgeous, light and airy 36,000 square foot center located in Danbury. More like a hotel. It's the only one of its kind in Connecticut. Yes, people come here to live out their last days, weeks or months. But we put the emphasis on *living*.

That means giving our patients and their loved ones the opportunity to live fully in the face of loss.

Our goal is to make every day the best it can be for each and every patient—from babies to adults.

To learn more, see MakingtheBestofEveryDay.org

The Regional Hospice Center for Comfort Care & Healing.

We will change the way you think about hospice.



Making the Best of Every Day

MakingtheBestofEveryDay.org
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