



## Aloha from our House to Yours!

This time of year is always the busiest for us here at Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii (RMHC-HI). It's a healthy mixture of hard work and deep satisfaction, so who could really ask for more!

Coming up tomorrow at McDonald's restaurants throughout the state is the observance of McHappy Day. McHappy Day is designed to shine the spotlight on children and the important work done by RMHC-HI. It's the day of the year that local celebrities hang out at various McDonald's, helping to spread the word about RMHC-HI, and encouraging customers to each donate a dollar to help us assist seriously ill children and their families.

This two-page spread also gives us the chance to let everyone know more about us, the families that we serve, and the many ways the community steps forward to help. This opportunity was made possible through the kindness of McDonald's, Golden State Foods, Meadow Gold, and the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. More than any other reason, they do it because they truly care about the people in our island community.

Also, this Sunday is the 2010 RMHC-HI Gala event at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. It's our biggest annual fundraising event, and more than 700 people will gather to honor Don and Marion Murphy, owners of Murphy's Bar & Grill and long-time supporters of RMHC-HI. For more than twenty years, the Murphys have held a wonderful Christmas party and toy drive for the families staying at the Ronald McDonald Houses. You can imagine what an uplifting experience these gatherings are for families forced to be away from their homes during the holidays because of the seriousness of their child's medical condition.

The fact is that Don & Marion devote endless time and energy to giving back to the local community. Many Hawaii charities have been touched by their generosity, and their fundraisers for University of Hawaii athletics are almost legendary. There are tickets still available for Sunday's Gala. For more information, please call Candace Asam-Lopez right away at 973-5683 ext. 239.

Mahalo!

*Jeri Chang*

President, RMHC-HI

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# Barely a Chance

An eight-year friendship between two employees at the Four Seasons Hotel on Maui turned into love, and the "thirty-something" couple began to plot the course their lives would take together. Little did they know that bringing a baby into the world would bring with it, such challenges.

As soon as they found out that their baby was going to be a boy, Lara Bellini and Darrett Schoepner started thinking about what to name him. Although Lara wanted to name the baby Darrett, dad wasn't too excited about that. "I love my name now, but I hated it when I was growing up," he admits. "I wouldn't want to make him go through all the confusion.



Chance had an uphill battle after being born weighing just one pound, nine ounces.

But all of their plans, including what to name the baby, were suddenly put on hold when they found out there were serious problems with the pregnancy about six months in. Lara was flown to Kapiolani Medical Center for Women & Children in Honolulu, where doctors put her on strict bed rest, trying to delay what appeared to be an imminent premature birth.

"The doctors at the hospital are very caring, but they don't sugar-coat anything," Darrett says. "From the very beginning, they objectively discussed with us the chances of our baby living or dying. They told us that since Lara was in her 24th week, his chances were 50-50, and that each day he stayed in mom's womb, his chance of survival would increase significantly. Every day seemed to revolve around his 'chance' of making it."

So it was then, that Chance Keali'i Salvatore Schoepner was born on April 21, 2009. Lara had

managed to make it to her 25th week of pregnancy, but Chance weighed just one pound, nine ounces.

The Wailuku couple spent countless hours each day by their baby's side as he fought for his life in the Intensive Care Unit. Doctors worked to help him grow stronger and make sure Chance's organs begin functioning fully. With each of the benchmarks that he met, he got closer to going home. But as preemies slowly develop, parents quickly learn to temper their high hopes with realistic expectations because often, progress is followed by setbacks, and the emotional roller-coaster could be too much.

It happened to them. Chance had been doing so well that it began to look like he could be able to go home even before his original due date of August 3. But he had a bad reaction after a vaccination, even requiring resuscitation at one point. Lara and Darrett say they felt like they were "starting all over again." But the couple was determined to do what ever it took to see it through, and Chance seemed to have that fighting spirit too. "All the nurses down at the NICU would say 'he's feisty'" Lara recalls.



Here are Lara and Darrett during their stay at the Ronald McDonald House.

Lara and Darrett credit their employers at the Four Seasons and their friends on Maui for giving "enormous support." A relative on Maui even created a website so that extended family members and friends could follow regular updates on Chance's condition, and even make donations to help the family with their medical expenses. Lara, Darrett and Lara's teen-aged daughter Sierra had just moved into a new house the day before they were medevaced to Oahu and hadn't even

## A letter from Hilo

Our journey began in December of last year when I was 19 weeks pregnant. The doctors diagnosed our unborn daughter with gastroschisis, which basically means her intestines were outside of her stomach. Because of my high-risk pregnancy, I was sent to Honolulu from our home in Hilo, and our lives changed drastically when my doctor decided to keep me there for closer observation. I was alone in a big city, which I knew nothing of. I had no family on the island and no one to turn to. Then I heard of the Ronald McDonald House through our social worker at Kapiolani Medical Center for Women & Children. I was happy, since staying there meant that I could have my boyfriend, Dryson with me on Oahu.

When the two of us arrived at the Oahu Avenue Ronald McDonald House a week before Christmas, we immediately felt the warmth of the RMH Staff. I recall standing in the kitchen and looking at the cloth that rested on the oven handle that said "home is where your heart is." This gave us a sense of security, being so far away from home during the holiday season. I soon learned that all the other couples in the house had premature babies in the NICU, and how this house became a refuge for them all.

It was a little difficult for families to get the holiday feeling, since most of their time was being spent at the hospital, but the Ronald McDonald House was so generous to give all the families gift cards. We also got to meet professional golfer Michelle Wie, who visited the Family Room, bringing with her presents and plenty of Christmas spirit.

We began spending most of our time at the Oahu Avenue House because I was at a sensitive stage of my pregnancy. Everyday, the staff would make an effort to see how each of us was doing at the House. Soon we started to befriend the staff and the other families who stay there.

Then, on January 26, 2010 we welcomed our first baby girl, Kailiyah, into the world and just as fast as she came, she was swept away by the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) nurses and doctors. After that day, our lives

became a routine. We learned that the daily shuttle service the Ronald McDonald House provided was very essential to us and other families. Every day we would catch a ride to Kapiolani Hospital on the 9:30 am shuttle, and then make the return trip to the House on the 8:30 pm van run. We spent a lot of time in the NICU, and the only place to take short breaks while our daughter slept was at the Ronald McDonald House Family Room.



Here are Dryson and Kailiyah after baby's release from the hospital

We learned that the people who facilitated the Family Room for all the parents where VOLUNTEERS, which we couldn't believe. We couldn't understand why people would regularly spend four hours of their time at the Family Room and not get paid for it. As we met many of them over time, we began to understand that these wonderful people weren't interested in getting something in return; they did it instead out of the goodness and kindness of their hearts to help us families at a very helpless time. They were angels in disguise. We also were humbled by other volunteers who make meals for the families staying at both Houses. Breakfasts, lunches, and most of all, dinners would come frequently throughout the week, and it helped us more than they knew. We were financially strained, and it

was nice to come home after a long day at the hospital and not worry or have to figure out what we were going to cook for dinner.

Now we are home in Hilo and enjoying our baby Kailiyah, who is doing really well. Both Dryson and I are excited to write this letter because it gives us a chance to say how deeply grateful we are for the many acts of kindness we experienced at the Ronald McDonald House. We have had the chance to thank some of the RMHC-HI staff and quite a few volunteers too. But we know that we will never have the chance to meet all the people in the community who, through their donations, made it all possible, so if you're listening—and we believe we're speaking for all the other families as well—thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

With love and aloha - Brigette Barroga and Dryson Bento

Hilo, Hawaii



Chance has come a long way in just 18 months!

unpacked their boxes. Their friends dug in and set up their House for them so they could return to an organized home instead of chaos.

"And we can't say enough about you guys at the Ronald McDonald House who made it as easy as possible for us to get through this," says Darrett. "We're fortunate to have stayed here, just three minutes away from the hospital. We didn't have to worry about where we're putting our heads down every night, where we're getting our meals, or where we're going to shower. We were able to just focus on being there for Chance without having to worry about everything else. That's all really important, especially when you realize you will be in Honolulu for two to three months or longer.

"And we really learned a lot while we stayed at the House," says Lara. "It was very interesting meeting people from Guam and other islands. For me personally, it's been nice talking with other people who are going through the same type of things we are. It's just comforting."

Darrett agrees. "Regardless of what walk of life we all come from, we are all parents with children who need medical assistance, and we all have that in common," he says. "We have the same stresses, the same worries. We all sit down over dinner and share our experiences with others that we probably never would have met if not for the circumstances. It's inspiring when others tell of their successes on a certain day."

"And when you think you've had a bad day," adds Lara. "Talking with everyone else helps a lot to put it in perspective."



Mom Brigette is enjoying their new treasure too.

## A LITTLE HELP GOES A LONG WAY

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- |                     |                                |                             |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Gift Cards</b>   | <b>Prepaid phone cards</b>     | <b>Food Items</b>           |
| Walmart             | Movie Tickets                  | Flour                       |
| Costco              |                                | Cooking oil                 |
| K-Mart              | <b>Household Items</b>         | Fresh fruits & vegetables   |
| Target              | Non-stick pots & pans cookware | Frozen meals (microwave)    |
| Sam's Club          | Paper towels                   | Individually wrapped snacks |
| Longs Drugs         | Ziplock bags (quart & gallon)  | Assorted canned goods       |
| Supermarkets        | Garbage bags (yard & kitchen)  |                             |
| Gasoline gift cards | Aluminum foil                  |                             |

I would like to make a donation today to Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii. Enclosed is my gift.

\$500   \$250   \$150   \$100   \$75   \$50   \$35   Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Enclosed is my check payable to Ronald McDonald House Charities of Hawaii

Please charge my:  Visa  MasterCard  American ExpressCard

Number \_\_\_\_\_

Exp.Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name as it appears on the card \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Please clip and mail to RMHC-HI, 1970 Judd Hillside Road, Honolulu, HI 96822 or to contribute online, go to [www.ronaldhousehawaii.com](http://www.ronaldhousehawaii.com) and click on DONATE.



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**Moo-halo for all you do!**  
Best Wishes to the Ronald McDonald House and McDonald's of Hawaii on McHappy Day!



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# GOOD LUCK

To RMHC® and McDonald's of Hawaii on McHappy Day!  
Golden State Foods encourages you to support RMHC and McDonald's on this very special day.

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