When 2017 began, Curtis was just starting his senior year of high school. He spent his spare time skateboarding and hiking the forests around Sequim, his hometown. He had a part-time job in landscaping and volunteered with the local Fire Explorer program; he was considering becoming a firefighter after graduation.

But in the spring, he started to have odd flashes of pain. At first, he chalked it up to his active lifestyle, but the episodes were unsettling. He'd wake up in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat, with sharp pangs coursing through his back. Over time, the pain worsened and spread into his leg, causing spasms and numbness.

Finally, he went to an urgent care clinic, which started a month of uncertainty as doctors tried to figure out whether he had cancer or a bone infection. “The scariest part was the unknown,” he says. “How serious is this? We had no way to know.”

Finally, the diagnosis: Curtis had Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. He was admitted to Seattle Children’s to start chemotherapy and checked into the Ronald McDonald House in Seattle.

At eighteen, Curtis was older than most of the other residents, and he struggled at first with how much his life had changed. “There were a lot of things I couldn’t do anymore,” he says. “I was away from home. I couldn’t even go out to skate without feeling sick.”

But the community around Curtis came together to help and support him. His family and friends took turns staying at the Seattle House with him. His high school in Sequim helped him finish his studies and let him attend prom and graduation.

Curtis quickly became friends with many of the staff, volunteers, and families at the Seattle House.

“This place is amazing,” says Curtis. “Everyone tries so hard to make this an environment where you feel comfortable and safe.”

After going home, Curtis will take some time to recover. “I’m going to chill for a second and figure out what to do with my life,” he says, laughing.

He still wants to become a firefighter, so he plans to start his studies soon.

But he won’t be done with the Seattle Ronald McDonald House: he plans to come back to the House to volunteer and provide support to families who are struggling with diagnoses similar to his. “I know what it’s like to stay here,” he says, with a shrug. “So I know how much these things matter.”

♥
A Decade of Pizza

Kosta and Judy Varlamos opened the pizzeria that bears their name in 1994. It’s on Northeast 45th Street, just a few blocks from the Seattle Ronald McDonald House and Seattle Children’s Hospital.

Over the years, they met many families who would come in for pizza and calzones between rounds of chemotherapy or other courses of treatment. In talking to them and hearing their stories, Kosta and Judy learned about RMHC and their lives there.

Ten years ago, they decided to find a way to give back, so they started to donate pizza to the House every month. For the first few months, they got a volunteer group together to serve the pizza; these days, they just deliver it and let families take it when they want.

“We don’t usually offer delivery,” says Judy, laughing, “but we make an exception for the Ronald McDonald House.” Over the ten years that they’ve been doing dinners at the Seattle Ronald McDonald House, Varlamos has donated over 1,200 pizzas. Varlamos also offers discounts to the groups who hold Pizza Nights at the House, as well as to families who come into the pizzeria.

Helping those undergoing treatment is a personal matter for Kosta, whose father has battled cancer four times. And the couple say that as longtime neighbors of the House, it’s important to them to find a way to give back.

“We have kids of our own, and we empathize with those parents, even if we can’t imagine what they’re going through,” says Judy. “So we wanted to help out in any way that we could.”

Summer at RMHC

It was a busy summer at our Seattle and Anchorage Houses! Here’s a peek at what our families have been up to.
What will your legacy be?
A bequest to RMHC may be the most important gift you ever give. It allows us to provide an open door for families with a child facing cancer, hot meals for exhausted parents, and so much more.

Contact Heather Bauer for more information about bequests at 206.838.0614 or heather@rmhcseattle.org

Volunteer to cook a meal in 2018!

“You feel so much love from the people serving the meals. There are days where I don’t know where I’m going to get the strength from to get through the day, and it’s such a relief to see that there are meals all week and a movie on the weekend.”
Ireland’s Mom

2018 still seems quite a ways off, but we’re already starting to look past the holidays and plan out our Family Meal Program schedule for next year. Would you volunteer to cook dinner in early 2018?

Our dinner calendar is always packed during the holidays, but we experience a drop-off in the early months of the year. So why not gather your coworkers, friends, or family for a fun and rewarding experience? It’ll be the perfect thing to break up those January doldrums.

For more info, visit rmhc-wwaak.org/volunteer today!

Volunteer Spotlight: Ruth Fox

Since starting to volunteer for RMHC five years ago, Ruth Fox has become a familiar face at the Seattle House front desk.

“I think of the front desk as being like the concierge of a hotel,” she says. “We answer the phones, we help people with their keys if they get locked out of their rooms. Above all, we try to be a welcoming presence.”

“Sometimes, the little things we’re able to do — giving a resident some shaving cream, or a stamp, or a basketball — can lighten the load a bit for families.”

At the front desk, Ruth gets to know almost everyone who has an interaction with the House: families, staff, volunteers, and donors. She’s always surprised by the many ways that people find to help out around the House. “You get to see this incredible generosity from the community,” she says. “There’s always someone walking in the door wanting to do something kind.”

Over time, Ruth has taken on more duties related to the front desk, like training new volunteers and managing the volunteer schedule. Since she knows all of the volunteers and is such a big part of keeping the front desk running smoothly, some of the other front desk volunteers have jokingly started to call her Mom. She admits that a few of them even signed a Mother’s Day card for her this year.

Even though she has devoted so much time to the House over the years, Ruth still feels humbled by the families she meets. “I’m not sure that those of us who haven’t lived here, who haven’t gone through these experiences, can truly understand what the House means to the families,” she says. “I don’t find it difficult to continue volunteering — I find it very rewarding and I look forward to it.” ♥
Hold a Donation Drive

Holding a donation drive with your workplace, friends, or family is an easy way to make a big impact in the lives of our families all year long. Here are some ideas:

Food
With 80 families at a time using our free pantry, we go through an enormous amount of food here at the House.

Toiletries and essential items
Diapers, shampoo, paper towels — we need more than just food to support our families.

Toys
Your donations to our toy room will give our parents a chance to “shop” for gifts for their children.

Visit rmhc-wwaak.org/drives to see detailed wish lists!