



**Ronald
McDonald
House®**
Alberta

Volunteer Newsletter

Families rely on the care we provide

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To the Wonderful Ronald McDonald House® Volunteers,

As we move into 2026, I want to begin the year with a simple but heartfelt message: thank you.

Your time, energy, and compassion are the foundation of everything we achieve together. Because of you, our mission is not just a statement—it's an impact felt by families every day. No matter your contribution, your commitment truly matters in delivering the mission of Ronald McDonald House.

The year ahead brings new opportunities to learn, to serve, and to make an even greater difference. We continue to work towards better engagement with our volunteers through the newsletter, access to Ronald McDonald House training, and opportunities to connect volunteers to each other across the province.

In 2026, we will be bringing on more support for our volunteers through the recruitment of Volunteer Supervisor/Volunteer Lead roles. These roles will support our in-House volunteers, recruitment of new volunteers, and additional training supports for volunteers. We could never achieve the success we've had without the support of volunteers, and in 2026 the organization is making a commitment to recognizing and supporting volunteers in more enhanced and engaging ways.

After the exciting expansion and grand opening in Calgary in 2025, the announcement of the location of the Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton allows us to further our work on expansion. Over the coming weeks and months, we are hard at work identifying locations and opportunities for our growth alongside a new hospital.

We will face challenges, build on our successes, and continue growing together—and I am confident that with your dedication, 2026 will be a year of meaningful progress and shared success.

On behalf of our entire organization, thank you for choosing to give your time and talents. We are deeply grateful to walk into this new year with you by our side.

Wishing you and your loved ones a healthy, fulfilling, and inspiring 2026.

With sincere appreciation,



Jason Evanson
Chief Executive Officer

Boost Your Well-Being This Winter

The start of the year can feel long and chilly, so here are four simple tips to help you stay energized and positive through January, February, and March:



Practice Daily Gratitude

Take a moment each day to reflect on something you're thankful for. It could be a person, an experience, or even a small win.

Gratitude boosts mood and resilience.

“Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions.” – Zig Ziglar



Stay Connected

Reach out to a fellow volunteer or friend for a quick chat or coffee. Social connection is a powerful way to combat winter blues and maintain positivity.

“Connection is why we're here; it gives purpose and meaning to our lives.”

– Brené Brown



Schedule Micro-Wellness Breaks

Pause for five minutes during your day to breathe deeply, stretch, or listen to calming music. These short breaks help reduce stress and refresh your mind.

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes... including you.”

– Anne Lamott



Move Your Body

Aim for a short walk outdoors or gentle stretches indoors. Physical movement improves energy and mental clarity—especially during the colder months.

“Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live.” – Jim Rohn

Taking small steps toward wellness can make a big difference. Thank you for all you do—your care and commitment brighten the lives of families every day. Stay warm, stay connected, and take time for yourself this season!

Meet Therapy Dog Kato

(Interview by his human, **Heather**)



What is Kato's breed and age?

Kato, like potato. He is a Pure-bred Tibetan Terrier. I retired in January 2020 and got Kato in April 2020. He will be six in February 2026.

How would you describe Kato's personality in three words?

Calm, cuddly and adaptable.

What does Kato enjoy doing in his free time?

Kato is a lover of walks! He is constantly in and out of the House and will take any walk, long or short! I also keep him show-coat ready, so he gets groomed every day.

Does Kato have any funny quirks or unique traits?

Kato is such a magnet for people. When I first got him, I had no intention of starting Pet Therapy. However, he is so handsome, it is an instant conversation starter. People pull over their cars to ask me what kind of dog he is.

What inspired you to volunteer with Kato at Ronald McDonald House?

I started volunteering when I went to pick up some family members and saw a huge poster for Pet Therapy Society of Northern Alberta at the Edmonton International Airport. I thought that it was interesting and wanted to find out more. As soon as the office opened post-COVID, we got started! I saw Ronald McDonald House asking for volunteers on TV, inquired about Pet Therapy, and we have been here ever since.

What does a typical visit look like for you and Kato?

He has a special leash, so he knows when he's on duty. He knows when he sees it, we are going to work. We are at the House on Saturday Mornings. We have been there for three years.

Can you share a memorable moment from a visit that really stuck with you?

A teenager came and laid on the floor with him for, I think, about half an hour. It was quiet, and she didn't want to talk. She just wanted to lie there—there was no script.

Just for Fun

If Kato could talk, what do you think he'd say about visiting the House?

He would say, "Oh, please come pet me! Let's have some fun! Or, 'We can just lie here. I will stay.'"

If Kato had a job title at the House, what would it be?

Kato the Companion. His name is from the companion in the Pink Panther Movie.

Day in the Life of a Baker

Meet Lee Anne Gelfand, a longtime baker at the Calgary House and newest member of the 1,000 Hours Society. You can find her baking treats on Fridays. A Taylor Swift fan, she began baking at age seven with an Easy Bake Oven and loves creating moments of comfort and connection for families—helping them feel at home while making memories.



Lee Anne, what does the Baker role mean to you personally?

Being a baker at Ronald McDonald House is about more than desserts—it's about caring for families. Through special requests, shared stories, and celebrating milestones, I found connection and comfort in every cake, cookie, and conversation, helping families feel at home while making memories.

What inspired you to start volunteering at the House?

Volunteering has been part of my life since I was 11, when I visited the seniors' residence with my grandma and helped at the tuck shop, a little store on wheels that felt like a vintage comfort cart. Over the years, I've supported cancer connection programs and breast cancer patients, scooped ice cream, and brought small comforts to people in need. Each experience has shown me the power of giving time and creating moments that make a difference. The House was my next place to help.

How has volunteering changed you or shaped your perspective?

Volunteering has taught me that perspective is everything. I've learned that most complaints are just wasted energy, and focusing on what truly matters, helping others, brings so much more fulfillment. It has shaped me to be more patient, positive, and solution-oriented, both in volunteering and in life.

How do you see your role connecting to the bigger mission of the House?

My presence, my age, and my lifetime of experiences make me feel like everyone's mom at the House. I can't turn that off—if I see someone who needs help, I will step in and say something. For me, it's about being there in a way that feels natural and supportive, making sure families know they're not alone during such a difficult time.

If the kitchen had a soundtrack, what song would be playing during your shift?

If the kitchen had a soundtrack during my shift, it would definitely be Taylor Swift. I went to her concert last December with my daughter, and her music always feels upbeat and happy: perfect for creating a warm, positive atmosphere while baking.

Coffee, tea, or something else to power you through your shift?

Most days coffee. I always bring my own.

What's your must-have item to bring with you when you volunteer.

My must-have items are my apron, my hand mixer, and my heart-shaped measuring spoons. They have little sayings like "a dash of love," which make baking feel even more special.

Crispy Buttermilk Oven-Fried Chicken

Recipe by Executive Chef Soham Nimkar

Prep time: **15 mins (plus marinating time)** Cook time: **40–45 mins** Yields: **4 servings**



Left: Finished Crispy Buttermilk Oven-Fried Chicken | Right: Executive Chef Soham Nimkar with his parents

Ingredients

Meat

1 lb Chicken thighs (bone-in, skin-on is best for roasting)

1 lb Chicken drumsticks

Marinade

2 cups Buttermilk (enough to fully submerge the chicken)

2 Bay leaves (crushed or torn to release flavor)

1 tbsp Whole black peppercorns

1 tbsp Lemon pepper seasoning

1 tsp Cayenne pepper (adjust to 2 tsp if you want more heat)

Breading

1 cup All-purpose flour

1 cup Panko breadcrumbs

1 ½ tsp Salt

1 tsp Black pepper (ground)

1 tbsp Onion powder

1 tbsp Garlic powder

1 tbsp Paprika (Smoked paprika works great for color)

Cooking Spray - Canola, Olive oil, or Avocado oil spray

Instructions

1. Marinate the Chicken

In a large bowl or a gallon-sized Ziploc bag, combine the buttermilk, bay leaves, whole peppercorns, lemon pepper, and cayenne.

Add the chicken thighs and drumsticks, ensuring they are well coated and submerged.

Refrigerate for at least four hours, preferably overnight (up to 24 hours). This tenderizes the meat and infuses the lemon-cayenne flavor.

2. Prepare the Breading Station

Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C).

Line a baking sheet with foil for easy cleanup and place a wire rack on top. (Using a rack is crucial for air circulation, so the bottom doesn't get soggy). Spray the rack lightly with cooking spray.

In a wide, shallow bowl, whisk the flour, panko, salt, black pepper, onion powder, garlic powder, and paprika.

3. Bread the Chicken

Remove a piece of chicken from the buttermilk. Shake off the excess liquid and pick off any stuck whole peppercorns or bay leaf pieces.

Press the chicken firmly into the breading mixture. Turn and press again to ensure the panko and flour adhere to every crevice.

Place the breaded chicken on the prepared wire rack. Repeat with remaining pieces.

4. Bake to Crisp

Let the breaded chicken sit on the rack for about 10 minutes before baking (this helps the coating stick).

Generously spray the top of each chicken piece with cooking spray. This is the secret to getting the flour/panko to turn golden brown instead of looking chalky.

Bake for 40–45 minutes.

Halfway through (around the 20-minute mark), flip the chicken and spray any dry spots with more oil.

The chicken is done when the breading is golden brown and the internal temperature reaches 165°F (74°C).

5. Rest and Serve

Let the chicken rest on the rack for 5–10 minutes before serving. This keeps the juices inside the meat.

Home for Dinner: Warm Meals, Warm Hearts

Our Home for Dinner program brings families together around a comforting meal during some of their most challenging days. In the winter months, this support matters more than ever. Cold weather and long hospital stays can make life feel even heavier, and a home-cooked dinner offers warmth, relief, and a sense of normalcy. When volunteers and donors step in to provide these meals, they give families one less thing to worry about and create moments of comfort that truly make a difference.

Sign up to cook or donate today to help make these moments possible for families who need it most by visiting:

ronaldmcdonaldhousealberta.org/home-for-dinner



Meeting Corner

There are some exciting announcements about our meetings for 2026!

In addition to our Monthly Meetings, and our Monthly Volunteer Information Sessions, In-House Volunteers will now also get invited to our Ronald McDonald House Alberta & McDonald's 101 meetings.

These meetings are optional for volunteers.

Ronald McDonald House & McDonald's 101:

This is a virtual 2-hour session is hosted by our CEO, Jason Evanson. In this session you will learn more about Ronald McDonald House Alberta, Canada, and Global, and our connection to our founding and forever partner McDonald's.

The second exciting change is that going forward, all the invites will show up as shifts in the Volunteer Hub Calendar! You will now get to sign up, see the event, get the link and receive the reminders.



Upcoming Events 2026

Event locations and dates:

Grande Prairie: **June 1**, The Dunes Golf & Winter Club

Red Deer: **June 8**, Red Deer Golf and Country Club

Cold Lake: **June 13**, Cold Lake Golf & Winter Club

Lethbridge: **June 16**, Lethbridge Country Club

Edmonton: **June 24**, The Quarry

Canmore: **June 30**, Silvertip Resort

Get involved—learn more at ronaldmcdonaldhousealberta.org/events

