

Katie's Roar is Collecting Gifts for their Annual Christmas Toy Drive for the Ronald McDonald House

By JEN MILLER
Staff Writer

The most wonderful time of the year is on our doorstep, but for many, especially those who have suffered the loss of a child, the season is not as merry and bright as it once was.

"The absolute worst thing a parent can experience is the death of a child, and the holidays are tough because there is always that empty chair and the stocking with their name that never gets filled again," Lisa Bjorndahl shared. "To be honest, every day is hard when you lose a child, but the holidays are just heartbreaking, and there are many silent tears that roll down our cheeks as we try to make the best holiday we can for those still with us, but the emptiness in our hearts is gut-wrenching at times."

Following the loss of their daughter, Katie, who passed away in 2018, the Bjorndahls founded Katie's Roar, a nonprofit dedicated to honoring Katie's memory through acts of kindness and promoting mental



Last year, Lisa and Karen loaded up 2 SUVs with gifts donated by the community to bring to the RMHC.

health awareness. In September of 2023, Katie's Roar became involved

with the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) of the Red River

Valley by sponsoring a room, providing supplies, and cooking meals for the families residing there. Knowing how challenging the holiday season can be, Katie's Roar has made it part of their mission to spread a little joy through the Katie's Roar Toy Drive that ensures families staying at the RMHC have a Merry Christmas.

Thanks to the community's help, Katie's Roar Christmas Toy Drive has become an annual tradition that has lifted more spirits than donors will ever know. Those parents who are sitting beside a hospital bed trying to comfort their sick child, barely have the energy to accomplish everyday tasks, let alone the energy to pull the holidays together for the rest of their family. The very idea of purchasing Christmas presents while living out of a suitcase at the RMHC is a burden many of you have taken off their shoulders, and a blessing you have gifted their children in the past.

The RMHC is founded on "Keeping families together and providing the comforts of home while their kids receive medical care." The nonprofit, grounded "in heart, creativity, adaptability, and teamwork," first opened its doors in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1974. The first Fargo RMHC opened at 1234 North Broadway in 1982, and a second location in South Fargo in 2005.

In May 2018, RMHC of the Red River Valley found a new, larger home at 4757 Agassiz Crossing to replace the two smaller houses. "With the unwavering support of an RMHC founding partner, RMHC of the Red River Valley raised the funds to build a 17-guest-room, 30,000 square foot facility. www.rmhcfargo.org

The RMHC becomes home to many families who find themselves in heart-breaking, difficult situations that no parent ever wants to face.

"Families that stay at the RMHC have a child who is in critical care at the hospital, including the psychiatric hospital, or they may be staying there while their child is receiving cancer treatments, or with a preemie baby that needs to be close to the hospital.

The house is full of families staying there, and so there is a great need to help," Lisa explained.

Last year, Katie's Roar included in memory of Cole Carlson, who passed away on Katie's birthday in their annual toy drive. Cole is the son of Karen Kasin, who is both a dear friend of Lisa and had a hand in founding Katie's Roar.

"We got the call about his tragic accident while we were actually volunteering at the RMHC, making a meal for the families in honor of Katie's birthday. We finished up quickly and rushed right to Karen's home with another one of our best friends. It has been just shocking and so sad that both Karen and I, who have been long time best friends, both lost a child," Lisa shared.

"Cole was a very giving and generous person, who could light up a room with either a joke or a goofy smile on his face. Cole and Katie loved to laugh, lived life to the fullest, and

ROAR, Back Page

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Karen Kasin and Lisa Bjorndahl.

were two of the most compassionate and loving people. Karen and I are extremely proud of those kids! They both loved the holidays as kids, so it was only natural that the annual toy drive be in their memory. It is something that Karen and I do together to honor our beautiful and much loved kids."

Katie's Roar Christmas Toy Drive continues to gain momentum each

season and has become a part of our community's holiday tradition. With a community like Hawley full of warm and generous folks, who needs elves?

"Last year's toy drive doubled from the year before. We filled up two large SUVs and made our delivery. With the monies donated, we purchased numerous gas cards and items off their Amazon wish list," Lisa commented.



Created by Katie in 2013 that the family proudly displays at the RMHC during Christmas.

Katie's Roar Toy Drive is currently collecting Christmas gifts for the RMHC. If you would like to join in on the tradition, all you need to do is purchase an item(s) from the provided wish list flier and drop it off (unwrapped) at one of the following locations: Tony's Super Valu, Valley Premier Bank, Bell Bank, and Fill Thy Cup by December 1st.

If you would prefer to skip the shopping, but still want to make a monetary donation, donate online at katiesroar.com or scan the QR code on the flier, and Lisa and Karen will do the shopping for you.

This year, Katie's Roar invited Hawley students to join in the spirit of giving and has come up with fun incentives to thank them. I mean, who knows better than a child when it comes to giving another child the perfect Christmas gift? For example, how many adults know what a Squishmallow is, and yet it is one of the top-ten trending gifts? However, your child does, and they will pick out just the right one to go under the RMHC's Christmas tree.

Hawley Pre-k through sixth-grade students are currently competing in a challenge to see which class can donate the most gifts to Katie's Roar Toy Drive. The top three classes that donate the most will win a pizza party, fourth place will win ice cream treats, and fifth place will win cookies. Hawley High School students are also joining in on the fun. The TEAM Time class that donates the most items will win a Dilly Bar party.

"Our community, schools, businesses, and local organizations are just amazing and have always been so supportive in Katie's Roar's mission. It is very heartwarming to see everyone come together. I am just so overwhelmed with emotions by the love, kindness, and generosity that the Hawley community has always shown. I am so proud to call Hawley my home," Lisa said. "This annual tradition means the world to us because there is no better feeling than to take a tragedy like our families have experienced and that the community has experienced and make something positive arise from it. I know Katie and Cole are extremely proud of everyone coming together to help those less fortunate because that is the kind of people they were."

Follow Katie's Roar Facebook page if you would like to learn more about their mission and future updates.



Katie's Roar took the generous donation they received from First Interstate Bank and used it to sponsor a room in the RMHC.

KATIE'S ROAR

CHRISTMAS TOY DRIVE

In memory of Katie Bjorndahl and Cole Carlson

Benefiting the Ronald McDonald House

Every donated item brings comfort, joy and a reminder that the families at the Ronald McDonald House of Fargo are surrounded by love and support and Katie's Roar is proud to be a part of that during this giving season!

ITEMS TO DONATE:
ITEMS MUST BE NEW & UNWRAPPED

ITEMS FOR BABIES/TODDLERS
Teethers, cloth books, clip-on stroller toys, musical toys, interactive pop-up toys, "Learn with Me" walkers, activity tables, Duplos, bath toys, crawl and chase toys

ITEMS FOR KIDS
LEGO sets, Magna-Tiles, Funko Pops, National Geographic science kits, bracelet-making kits, oversized monster trucks, Nerf toys, Squishmallows, fidget toys, giant coloring books, Pokémon cards, baby dolls, Barbies, board games, craft sets, puzzles

ITEMS FOR TEENS
Makeup kits, sports fan gear, silent basketball or soccer ball, selfie stick, eye mask, bath bombs, weighted blankets, headphones, phone chargers, portable speakers, Funko Pops, nail care or nail polish, sensory toys, hair accessories (scrunchies, clips, etc.), beauty lotion sets, fuzzy socks

ITEMS FOR ADULTS
Board games, annual planner, lunch boxes, massage device, Bath & Body Works products, HydroJug, Stanley, blankets, fuzzy socks, gift cards - (Gas, McDonald's, Walmart, Ulta, Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Starbucks, pizza), tie blankets, water bottles, beauty sets, adults' games, men's deodorants or cologne, men's grooming products

DROP-OFF LOCATIONS:
DROP-OFF ITEMS UNTIL DEC. 1

- Tony's Super Valu - Hawley
- Valley Premier Bank - Hawley
- Bell Bank - Hawley
- Fill Thy Cup - Hawley



Want us to do the shopping for you?...
You can make your monetary donation by scanning the QR Code!

Or donate online at Katie'sRoar.com



Ronald McDonald House Charities®
of the Red River Valley