



The Olson Family

**"Observe around you.
An opportunity awaits."**

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A mission born close to home

For Mark and Mary Olson of Moose Lake, the meaning of community changed in 2019 when their granddaughter Olivia was born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome, a severe, life-long congenital heart defect.

Before she turned three, Olivia had undergone three open-heart surgeries, countless procedures, and long hospital stays. Through it all, the dedicated care teams at the Herma Heart Institute at Children's Wisconsin helped transform her journey into one defined by strength and resilience.

What began as a small fund created by Olivia's parents, Meg and Dan Olson, soon became the spark for something larger. In 2022, Mary founded Take It to Heart, a nonprofit devoted to raising awareness and supporting families affected by congenital heart disease (CHD).

"It has been such an honor and privilege to connect with families traveling this same journey," says Mary.

Why the cause matters

CHD is the most common birth defect, affecting nearly one in 100 babies. At the Herma Heart Institute – one of the nation's premier pediatric cardiac centers – more than 22,000 children and families receive care each year. Gifts help fund lifesaving technology, research initiatives, family support programs, and specialized treatment that many children rely on from before birth through adulthood.

Meg, Olivia's mom, plays a vital role in supporting the mission. She serves on parent-physician committees, attends national conferences, and connects with families whose children face similar challenges. Her insights help shape future advances in CHD care.

"No family expects a heart diagnosis," says Meg. "What helps most is connection – to other parents, to skilled teams, and to a caring community. Take It to Heart supports that need."

An event that brings the lakes together

Take It to Heart's annual fundraising benefit has become a cherished Lake Country tradition. The fourth annual event,



Take It to Heart

Lake Country neighbors rallying to support children with congenital heart disease

SUBMITTED BY MARK OLSON
AMBASSADOR | TAKE IT TO HEART

PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY
TAKE IT TO HEART



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held in November 2025 at Smoke on the Water overlooking Okauchee Lake, welcomed nearly 200 attendees.

Guests enjoyed Smoke on the Water's signature BBQ, the excitement of the Packers vs. Giants game, and a wide range of raffles, auctions, and a Gift Tree decorated with heart-shaped ornaments offering a special surprise.

A moving halftime message from young heart-warrior Katie McCardle brought the room to a quiet pause and reminded everyone of the courage behind the statistics.

"People enter as strangers and walk out as family," Mary says.

A community of generosity

Most donated items came from Lake Country businesses – local shops, restaurants, artisans, and service providers offering more than 100 contributions. Their generosity helped make the event not only fun, but deeply impactful.

Growing impact

Since its founding, Take It to Heart has helped raise nearly \$100,000 for Children's Wisconsin. Every dollar supports innovations and resources that help CHD families navigate a lifelong journey with hope.

The Olsons, together with a dedicated board and volunteers, continue to strengthen the mission each year. Join us in making a difference.

2025 Take It to Heart — At a Glance

- 4th annual event
- Sold-out event — 190 attendees (double 2024)
- 30-plus raffle baskets
- 25 auction items
- 75 gift tree ornaments
- 100% of proceeds donated to Children's Wisconsin

*To learn how you can make an impact,
visit TakeItToHeart.org.*

Facebook: [@takeittoheart4kids](https://www.facebook.com/takeittoheart4kids)

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