



## **CANCER SURVIVOR POSTPONES REBUILDING OWN HOME AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA TO REOPEN RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE® OF NEW ORLEANS**

*Despite Great Personal Losses in 2005, Lynn Giuffria Made it Her Mission to Resurrect 'Home Away From Home' For Families with Children Receiving Care in Nearby Hospitals*

New Orleans in 2005 was a tumultuous place and time for Lynn Giuffria, director of the Ronald McDonald House in New Orleans. That January, she was diagnosed with cancer. When Hurricane Katrina struck in late August, her only son went missing. Two weeks after the storm, Giuffria learned both her home and the Ronald McDonald House she manages had been destroyed by flooding and wind damage.

On the morning of Saturday, August 27, 2005, Lynn Giuffria received a call from her brother alerting that a giant storm was on its way. She turned on the TV and saw a radar map of the entire Gulf being encompassed by a red mass. Giuffria phoned Tony Herques, a McDonald's Owner/Operator who was elected board president of Ronald McDonald House Charities® (RMHC®) of Greater New Orleans two weeks before Katrina struck. She informed him she was evacuating her four-person staff and the 12 families from the House.

Most families fled to nearby hospitals where their children were receiving treatment. Once the House was safely evacuated, Giuffria headed to Orange Beach to seek refuge at her brother's condo. Her 24-year-old son Marcus assured his mother that he'd seek refuge with a friend in the warehouse district. On the morning of Monday, August 29, 2005, surging floodwaters, winds and storms tore through the New Orleans Ronald McDonald House in the Mid-City area. After the levees broke, flooding destroyed the first floor, causing severe damage to the interior of the House.

While Giuffria had made it safely to Orange Beach, her son Marcus had to be rescued by a friend's boat. Instead of speeding off to safety, the two boys began rescuing stranded residents. With power-lines downed by 150 mph winds, phones were out of service and Giuffria had no way to reach her son. A week later, Giuffria received word Marcus was okay – though he would later confess he'd been shot at several times while attempting to rescue Katrina victims.

When Giuffria and Herques were finally able to reach the House two weeks after the storm, they found the flooding had reached the second floor of the House and winds had severely damaged the roof. Mold and mildew blackened the walls on the first floor. Everything inside was destroyed.

But Lynn's determination to the families who stay in the Ronald McDonald House was so great she made it her mission to once again provide them with a home away from home while their children receive pediatric care at nearby hospitals. She did it. And even as the House reopens its doors less than a year after Katrina struck, Giuffria's own home remains in ruins.

The rebuilt 15-room Ronald McDonald will continue to serve three hospitals in the New Orleans area and families from all around the Gulf Coast.

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