Dreamcatcher commemorates those lost to COVID-19, celebrates life and art

For Rebecca McIntosh, MercyOne Comfort Health Center for Women scheduler, art and healing make a perfect partnership.

“I truly believe that art is more than just a hobby; it’s therapeutic, and it breaks down barriers between people. It changes lives.” McIntosh is a lifelong artist, and has enjoyed all forms of artistic expression, “ever since I could hold a pencil,” she said.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Iowa in March, MercyOne quickly set up COVID-19 testing sites where McIntosh volunteered to work. “I wanted to do something to help, to support my colleagues, as well as patients,” said McIntosh. “It has been really heartwarming to see all the MercyOne colleagues who have stepped up to help during the pandemic.”

McIntosh was also searching for a way to commemorate the Iowans who have been lost to COVID-19, but in a way that was lively and hopeful. “Art can be so uplifting, and celebrating life should be that way, too. I wanted to make something true to the heart of all the individuals impacted, and the people who love them.”

As she was looking for inspiration, McIntosh remembered an enormous outdoor tabletop she had been given years earlier. “For two years, I wanted to make an enormous dreamcatcher, and I thought, this tabletop is perfect,” she said.

Within her masterpiece, there are 20 gold metal feathers for the year 2020, as well as actual feathers for everyone who has died from COVID-19. The dreamcatcher is both a dedication, and a reminder, to help carry on the dreams of those who have been lost. The large open space on one side of the dreamcatcher represents hope for the future and looking forward for all Iowans.

When McIntosh brought her dreamcatcher to the office, it quickly became a conversation starter. “People came to look at the dreamcatcher, and they would tell others about it,” she said. “Everyone who comes to look at it feels an impact, and I have learned so much about people through this project. The biggest takeaway is that we all have grief we are processing right now. It’s been a really, really hard year – everyone is hurting in some way. This art gives people an invitation to be vulnerable and to mourn.”

While McIntosh is glad her latest project has moved so many people, she wants to stress that the point of the dedication is to celebrate life and be hopeful. “This dreamcatcher is meant to be a memorial not only for those who have died, but for all of us. I want it to serve as a reminder of the men and women who were individuals, with unique dreams. We can stop and take a minute to reflect on their stories, and also to carry on for them, and for Iowa.”
Ronald McDonald House celebrates first anniversary

January 2021 marked the first anniversary of the Ronald McDonald House at MercyOne Children’s Hospital. Located on the fourth floor, the space includes 14 bedroom suites, a full-size kitchen and dining room, laundry room, play room and respite rooms to serve the families of patients who are receiving treatment at MercyOne Children’s Hospital.

The Ronald McDonald House served a total of 153 patients and their families in the past year, with an average stay of 12 nights per family. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a short period where the Ronald McDonald House was unable to check-in new families, but had to refer them to nearby hotels, instead. Restrictions meant adapting the nightly meal program to to-go meals in order to safely serve all families. The in-house meal provider program also was temporarily halted due to the pandemic. However, throughout the hiatus, the Ronald McDonald House continued to provide meals, thanks to continued generous grocery donations.

Pop tabs and grocery item donations continue to be accepted, including disinfectant wipes, fresh fruit and veggies, deli meat, individual packaged snacks and chips, and gift cards to local grocery stores.

"Having a Ronald McDonald House inside the hospital made it possible for us to pivot our services and continue to support families through our new in-hospital family meal program during the pandemic," said Meggie Curtis, manager of the Ronald McDonald House at MercyOne Children’s Hospital. "Families can enjoy healthy meals and snacks throughout the day and not leave the hospital. This not only eases the financial burden on these families, but also one less thing hospital staff need to provide."

For more information about Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Iowa, or ways you can help, please visit rmhdesmoines.org. MercyOne colleagues are welcome to volunteer by preparing a meal, preparing casseroles or baking. For more information about our current volunteer opportunities, please contact jessica@rmhdesmoines.org.

**Save the Date:**

**Colleague Open Forums**

Social distance guidelines will be observed during all sessions. Watch “News Briefs” and your email for Zoom meeting information.

**Wednesday, Feb. 17, at 7:30 a.m., 10 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.**
East Tower Auditorium
MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center

**Wednesday, Feb. 24, at 7:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m.**
Cownie Conference Room
MercyOne West Des Moines Medical Center

153 Overnight families served in 2020
125 nights Longest stay
12 nights Average stay
1,950 To-go meals