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# Hong Kong attorney offers helping hand to 'home-away-from-home'

By Tom Kirvan

Attorney Dominic Wai has played a key role in assisting Ronald McDonald House Charities – Hong Kong, offering his legal expertise to the board as well as his fund-raising efforts. He is pictured, second from left, helping accept a check from a generous donor to the charity.



**S**eparated by 8,100 miles and two distinct cultures, the cities of Hong Kong and Philadelphia have one particularly important common denominator.

The Ronald McDonald House Charities.

The international nonprofit traces its roots to the City of Brotherly Love on the East Coast of the United States when an unlikely partnership was formed in 1974 between an NFL team, a children's hospital, and a restaurant chain. The combination would eventually spawn an international phenomenon that would link cities around the world in an effort to provide a "home-away-from-home" environment for families of seriously ill children undergoing medical treatment at nearby hospitals.

Hong Kong attorney Dominic Wai, a partner with ONC Lawyers in the city of 7.3 million people, was hoping to broaden the scope of his community service work in 2015 when coincidentally he was invited to fill a board vacancy for Ronald McDonald House Charities-Hong Kong.

"I joined the charity over 6 years ago when I was with my last firm," says Wai, a litigator and cybersecurity expert. "A representative from my last firm always had a seat on the board due to historical reasons. When the last representative left, no one from the firm took up the seat and I was asked to take it up. I did not have any charity or much volunteer work experience at that time, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to contribute

and learn. So, I joined and have been helping with different aspects of the charity ever since."

Accordingly, Wai has become familiar with the story of the Ronald McDonald House movement that began somewhat innocently in Philadelphia and now has spread to 64 countries around the world over the past 48 years.

"The seeds of the partnership were planted when Kim Hill, the 3-year-old daughter of Philadelphia Eagles tight end Fred Hill, was diagnosed with leukemia," according to the Ronald McDonald House website. "Hill and his wife camped out on the hospital chairs and benches, ate food from vending machines, and did all they could to keep Kim from seeing their sadness, exhaustion, and frustration. All around them the Hills saw other parents doing exactly the same thing. They learned that many of the families had traveled great distances to bring their children to the medical facility, but the high cost of hotel rooms was prohibitive. They continued to think, 'There has to be a happy medium.'"

Miraculously, there was, as Hill went to work rallying the support of his Eagle teammates and team executives to help other families experiencing the same emotional and financial trauma as his own.

Spurred on by McDonald's Regional Manager Ed Mensi, owner/operators of the popular restaurant chain in the Philly area began to chip in, donating proceeds from the sale of Shamrock Shakes to help fund the construction of the first Ronald McDonald House in 1974.

Five years later, the number of Ronald McDonald Houses had grown by 10. Over the next 5 years, 60 more houses had been



**Dominic Wai**

built in communities across the country. Another 53 opened in the following 5 years, as "people viewed the Ronald McDonald House as a way for a community to band together, for their neighbors in need of comfort and security during a particularly difficult time," according to the website.

Wai, who earned his law degree from City University of Hong Kong, is proud to be part of the international network that has been a lifeline and safety net for countless families.

"We help sick children and provide a place for the family to stay together while the sick child is going through medical treatment or recuperating so that the child can have family support and care," said Wai, who noted that the first Ronald McDonald House in Hong Kong was built more than 25 years ago.

He soon will be doubly proud when a second home opens its doors.

"The charity is building a second house with 66 rooms – the first house has 23 – near the Hong Kong Children's Hospital and we aim to complete it by the first quarter of 2023," Wai said. "We hope to be able to help more children and their families with the establishment of the second house." 

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