SECURING THE PROMISE

SPRING 2019

A New Heart
Your investment helps hearts keep beating

Legacy of a Promise
Donors honor retiring Le Bonheur president, Meri Amour

More Room at the Inn
$12-million expansion triples the space at FedExFamilyHouse
In this issue:

2 A NEW HEART  Your investment helps hearts keep beating

6 YOUR SUPPORT KEEPS HEARTS BEATING  How you make a difference for the heart transplant program

12 IMAGINING A BETTER TOMORROW  Donor’s gift supports mechanical heart pump

13 SHARING MY HEART  Nurse practitioner connects with patients who share his diagnosis

14 BIG HEART  Mom honors son’s life with the Big Heart Fund

16 LEGACY OF A PROMISE  Donors honor work of Le Bonheur’s 8th president, Meri Armour

18 CONFIDENCE WITH COMPASSION  Houston family finds hope for brain tumor diagnosis, gratitude for Le Bonheur

20 MORE ROOM AT THE INN  $12-million expansion triples the space for families far from home

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For more information about ways to support Le Bonheur Children’s by volunteering, attending events, developing partnerships and giving financially, please visit lebonheur.org/ways-to-help or call 901-287-6308.

www.lebonheur.org/secure
MESSAGE FROM MERI

Dear Friends,

We often say “donors are the heart of Le Bonheur.” The heart is a magnificent muscle that pumps oxygen-rich blood throughout the entire body. Each beat delivers this life-giving fuel to every cell of the human body. Every function of our bodies is dependent on the heart.

You, just like the human heart, give life. Your impact flows through this hospital building and spreads out into the community. We are truly dependent on you to keep the heart of Le Bonheur beating.

This issue of Securing the Promise highlights some of the amazing children who have received or are waiting on heart transplants. In the past two years, we have completed 27 transplants. This huge undertaking was only possible because of the investments of donors like you. Please know you make a difference here every single day, and we are eternally grateful for you.

This is the last issue of Securing the Promise while I am president of Le Bonheur. It has truly been my honor to serve alongside you. Le Bonheur always holds a special place in my heart, and I look forward to the good work that will continue here. Thank you for your generous support.

With gratitude,

Meri Armour, MSN, MBA
President
Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital
A New Heart

When Carlin Johnson’s life was at risk, he found a new heart at Le Bonheur

13-year-old Carlin Johnson spent last summer with his grandmother. But it wasn’t the carefree days he expected.

“I was getting progressively more tired,” he said about what he remembers of last summer. “I had stopped being able to walk every day with my grandmother. I was too tired, and I felt like I couldn’t breathe.”

A trip to the walk-in clinic turned into a trip to the hospital in Ripley, Miss., ending in a helicopter flight to Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Carlin’s heart was failing. In the Emergency Department (ED), he remembers at least nine different doctors coming in and out of the room. He had so much fluid and pressure on his heart he couldn’t lie flat on the exam table.

A trip to the walk-in clinic turned into a trip to the hospital in Ripley, Miss., ending in a helicopter flight to Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Carlin’s heart was failing. In the Emergency Department (ED), he remembers at least nine different doctors coming in and out of the room. He had so much fluid and pressure on his heart he couldn’t lie flat on the exam table.

Mississippi teen Carlin Johnson, with his mom Carrie, went from a healthy teen to needing a new heart last summer.

Carlin Johnson came back to the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit to visit the doctors and nurses who were by his side from the day he found out his heart was failing.
The verdict? He’d need a heart transplant. “I thought: ‘The doctor has got to be wrong,’” said Carlin’s mom, Carrie.

Fortunately for Carlin, Le Bonheur’s Heart Institute was ready to help him live. And all of the doctors in the ED were just the beginning of the team that would support him and his family throughout his heart transplant journey.

Le Bonheur revitalized the heart transplant program in 2016 — a crowning achievement in a growing Heart Institute. Last year, the Heart Institute was recognized as a top 10 program in U.S. News & World Report’s Best Children’s Hospitals list.

Building Le Bonheur’s Heart Institute and transplant program into one of the best took a significant financial investment that was only possible because of philanthropic gifts. Since 2015, Le Bonheur recruited 19 cardiologists, and staff has received specialized training to meet the needs of complex pediatric heart patients. Important investments were made in life-saving technology, including ventricular assist devices, which serve as mechanical heart pumps while a child waits for a transplant. And, the Heart Institute relied heavily on donors as the program was getting started. Transplant programs must demonstrate success to be certified by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and receive payment from insurance. CMS prefers to consider patient outcomes in their decision to certify a transplant program, so a program has to be prepared to perform a number of transplants at no cost to the patient.

Jeffrey A. Towbin, MD, chief of Cardiology, executive co-director of the Heart Institute, and medical director of cardiomyopathy, heart failure, and transplant services credits the culture of Le Bonheur, the vision of its leaders and generosity of its donors — as well as the skill and work ethic of his team at the Heart Institute — for their success.

“Heart failure and transplant medicine is a multidisciplinary type of medicine,” said Towbin. “It’s not just that the surgeons and transplant or heart failure doctors have to work tightly together. We need nursing support that’s specifically knowledgeable about this. We need other physicians, like cardiac intensive care doctors, who not only understand heart failure and transplant care, but also understand that they have to collaborate.”

Nephrologists, infectious disease doctors, social service providers, pharmacists — all of these disciplines and more are part of the reason the relatively young heart failure and transplant
program at Le Bonheur is successful.

When Towbin arrived at Le Bonheur four years ago, the heart transplant program had been dormant since 1998 and the hospital lacked heart failure services. He had developed top-level pediatric heart programs in both Houston and Cincinnati and was ready to do the same at Le Bonheur at his arrival in 2015.

He first recruited Umar Boston, MD, to serve as the surgical director of the heart transplant, mechanical circulatory support and adult congenital disease programs. Trained at the Mayo Clinic, Boston came to focus on the heart for intensely personal reasons.

“My dad passed away from heart disease when I was 10 years of age,” he said.

Boston said he is drawn to the complexities of pediatric cardiac surgery. “We do maybe 15 different operations, and there are an infinite number of variations within a given congenital heart defect. So it’s always very stimulating and challenging and technically very appealing, too,” Boston said.

During the first year of the revitalized transplant program, Towbin and Boston expected they would do around six transplants. They did 12 — as many as some of the country’s largest pediatric transplant programs.

“We went full-in with difficult cases right from the beginning,” Towbin said, a practice he felt would be successful because of the quality of the surgeons and the strength of the programs and protocols his team had put together across specialties. “Our initial success built our confidence early on so we were able to accept increasingly

“We have a strong team driven by the desire to advance the care of children with heart failure. Their drive and talent will help keep us among the top rung, which is important because children here deserve top care.”

Jeffrey A. Towbin, MD, chief of Cardiology at Le Bonheur and executive co-director of the Heart Institute

Transplant Surgical Director Umar Boston, MD, with Jada, one of the 27 patients at Le Bonheur to receive heart transplants since the program started in 2016.
more complicated cases and help more children.”

Thanks to the support of donors, the Heart Institute continues to grow to meet the needs of children in our region. The hospital recently announced the largest expansion to the hospital since it opened the new facility in 2010 — an addition of 19 beds, most in the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit, as well as an MRI-guided hybrid cath lab to meet the increased demand for minimally-invasive procedures.

“We have a strong team driven by the desire to advance the care of children with heart failure,” said Towbin. “Their drive and talent will help keep us among the top programs, which is important because children here deserve top care.”

Thanks to Le Bonheur’s robust transplant program, Carlin Johnson is six months past his own transplant surgery, which happened exactly a month after he arrived at Le Bonheur in August 2018. He spent 50 days in cardiovascular intensive care, but has recovered well, say his doctors. Almost immediately after surgery, Carlin could tell he had more energy and wasn’t so tired.

On a recent check-up visit back at Le Bonheur, nurses streamed into the hall to see him, and doctors asked about his latest video game wins. “We miss him here,” said one.

His mom, Carrie, sees progress, too, and not just in the clinical details.

“His mom, Carrie, sees progress, too, and not just in the clinical details.

“He’s grown two inches since his last check up,” she said, relief visible on her face.

Carlin is eager to go back to school, where he’s visited a couple of times since his surgery.

“It was great to be able to walk the halls. I realize the things you take for granted until everything changes,” said Carlin. “My friends were glad to see I’m still ticking.”

Carrie said, “When he found out about the transplant, he cried at first. Before the surgery, Carlin lined up all of the surgery team and thanked each one.

Then he sat down and wrote a note thanking Dr. Boston.”

He still tears up when he thinks of what it took for him to get his new heart.

“It took someone losing their life for me to have this heart,” he said quietly. “I’m still wondering how the family feels who lost one of their members to give me this chance.”

Our Heart (Institute) is getting bigger

This spring, Le Bonheur Children’s announced a significant expansion to the Heart Institute. The two-story addition on the west side of the building will add 19 additional beds in order to create a 10-bed Cardiovascular Stepdown Unit and a 20-bed Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit. The project also includes a new MRI-guided hybrid catheterization lab bringing the total to three cath labs. Construction will begin later this year.

The expansion to the Heart Institute means we can help more kids like Greyson (pictured above) who was diagnosed with a heart defect during his mom’s 20-week ultrasound. When he was 4 months old, he was strong enough for the complex surgery to repair his heart. His mom, Madison, said, “It was the scariest day of my life. You give your baby over and just hope they can fix him.” Almost immediately after surgery, Greyson was a different baby — happy, healthy and growing. He’ll celebrate his first birthday in April.
Your support keeps hearts beating

The heart never takes a break. It has one job – to pump blood throughout the body. The rest of the body is dependent on that steady beat. When a child’s heart begins to fail, childhood takes a drastic turn.

For **Daniel**, a failing heart meant watching the school band play without him. His lungs weren’t strong enough to play the saxophone anymore.

For **Piper**, it meant riding her tricycle in loops around the hospital instead of playing outside.

For **Karlin**, it meant the whole family had to pick up their lives in New Orleans and move to Memphis to be closer to the care he needs.

Because of your support, these children and their families found hope at Le Bonheur. Hope for a new heart. Hope for a brighter tomorrow.

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**Piper Pettit, 3**

**STRONG HEART**

Sitting still in a hospital bed is hard for any 3-year-old.

For 115 days, Piper Pettit called a room in Le Bonheur’s Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU) home while waiting for a heart transplant. Before that, Piper had been in and out of another hospital near her home in Vardaman, Miss. Her short life has been marked by heart surgeries and long hospital stays.

Despite her weakened heart, Piper wanted to play like every other kid her age. A loop around the CVICU became her playground. She’d ride her tricycle around and around while two people would pull the machines that kept Piper’s heart pumping and another would guide the bike. With each loop, doctors and nurses would hide behind their doors or desks waiting to surprise their spunky patient. The sound of people singing “Baby Shark” would fill the halls.

Two weeks after receiving her new heart, Piper left the CVICU riding her tricycle. She moved to the cardiac floor – another step closer to going home.
### Daniel Cross, 14

**WAITING TO PLAY THE SAXOPHONE AGAIN**

In an ideal world, Daniel Cross will start high school next year. He’ll join his friends playing saxophone in the band, and he’ll show off his skills on the bowling team. Daniel waited at home in New Albany, Miss., to have the breath to play his saxophone and to have the strength to bowl.

“He had his last open heart surgery at 2 years old, and we only went to doctors for follow up appointments,” said Crystal. “But after his 13th birthday, he just couldn’t keep up anymore.”

Daniel waited 197 days for a heart transplant. And now Daniel is growing stronger and waiting to get back to high school.

### Uriah Harlow, 3

**NEW HEART GIVES URIAH ENERGY TO BE A TODDLER**

Uriah Harlow stopped eating. He couldn’t walk across a room without stopping to rest. Mom Sarah was surprised to learn her laid-back baby was really sick – his heart was only working at 10 percent of its capacity. Uriah was immediately airlifted from Tupelo, Miss., to Le Bonheur, where a heart failure team was ready to treat him. Oral and IV drug protocols to treat his condition were the first step. But those didn’t work.

“If he was going to live, he would need a heart transplant,” Sarah recalls the doctor telling her.

Two years post-transplant, Uriah is thriving – a funny and energetic child.

“It’s unreal the energy this kid has,” says Sarah.
Natalie Billings, 9

A LONG JOURNEY TO A NEW HEART

Natalie had three heart surgeries by the time she was 2 years old. Now 9, her heart is failing, and as she waits for a new heart, she must undergo cath procedures to cull veins from around her heart to prepare for the day she receives a new one. For now, Natalie is waiting – waiting to be able to swim again, to return to school with her friends and to take her Make-A-Wish trip to Universal Studios.

WE’RE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

Our Adult Congenital Heart Disease program provides long-term care plans, cardiology check-ups and care tailored perfectly for adults living with a pediatric defect.

Zecari Taylor, 2

MUSIC THERAPY HELPED ZECARI RECOVER

Zecari Taylor’s 200-day wait for a new heart was filled with needle sticks and procedures. Difficult for anyone, but especially a baby. That’s why Le Bonheur’s child life team has grown to 31, including music therapist, Taylor Brown. Every time Taylor came into Zecari’s room, she would immediately perk up.

“She loves music and loves to sing,” said Zecari’s dad, Christopher. “The music therapist helped her a lot – it helped her recover faster.”

Now 2, Zecari still delights in seeing Taylor when she comes for checkups.

YOU HELP KIDS BE KIDS

Thanks to donations, we have child life specialists dedicated to each unit. They use play, art and music to help children cope with being hospitalized.
**Jada Christian, 2**

**BEFORE SHE WAS BORN, LE BONHEUR WAS READY FOR JADA**

Jada wasn’t supposed to live. She was diagnosed in utero at 22 weeks with a serious heart condition. Scientific literature says kids like Jada don’t make it. At Le Bonheur Children’s Fetal Center, Jasmine learned her daughter’s only hope was a heart transplant.

“I was afraid, devastated and heartbroken. I was told early on that the odds were definitely against us. I wondered how would this play out. Is it worth the risk, will she be in pain?” said Jasmine.

It was worth the risk – today Jada is a happy little girl who loves playing with her brothers.

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**Gracie Lisil, 2**

**NEW HEART KEEPS GRACIE DANCING**

Your support helps kids like Gracie whose heart wasn’t strong enough to keep up with her personality. When Gracie was 10 months old, her little lips and fingers turned purple – a sign her heart was failing. On Sept. 15, her family got word that Gracie would receive a donor heart. Once the new heart started beating in her chest, the purple was gone, and her little cheeks turned rosy again. Now she’s home and delighting her family with her silly dance moves anytime she hears music.
**WE HAVE A GROWING NEED FOR SPECIALIZED CARE**

Our 10-bed Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit is staffed by nurses with specialized cardiac care training. We have plans to double the unit in order to grow with our patients’ needs.

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**LIFE-SAVING TECHNOLOGY**

Technology to treat kids with congenital heart defects has changed dramatically over the years. With your support, our patients have access to the most cutting-edge technology. Your gift drives innovation and allows children to lead longer and healthier lives.

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**FAMILY MOVES TO MEMPHIS FOR SON’S CARE**

When doctors at a New Orleans hospital said her son would need to travel to another hospital for a heart transplant, Marlei started researching online. She looked at U.S. News & World Report’s ranking of pediatric heart programs. She consulted quality data. Everything pointed to Memphis where Karlin would be first on the transplant list. Fewer than three months later, Karlin received a new heart.

“At 10:15 p.m. on Oct. 15, Karlin began his new life with his new heart,” Marlei said.

The whole family has begun a new life in Memphis – their new home so Karlin can be close to the doctors who saved his life.

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**BEST CHILDREN’S HOSPITALS**

**Cardiology & Heart Surgery**

2018-19

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**ONLY THE BEST FOR KIDS**

Because of your investments in Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital, the Heart Institute has reached new heights. We are the only pediatric heart program in the southeast recognized as Top 10 program by U.S. News & World Report’s “Best Children’s Hospitals” list.

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**LE BONHEUR’S FIRST HEART TRANSPLANT PATIENT**

After six weeks of waiting, Lyric became the first patient to receive a heart transplant at Le Bonheur on Oct. 22, 2016, at 20 months old. Within two days of her surgery, Lyric was brushing her teeth, playing with dolls and blowing bubbles.

“She has so much joy and so much energy,” said her mom, Quinntrisa. “I can’t keep up with her anymore. She just loves life.”

Thanks to her new heart, Lyric is now an energetic 4-year-old who loves to dance and is ready to start school.

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**Karlin Jackson, 1**

**FAMILY MOVES TO MEMPHIS FOR SON’S CARE**

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**Lyric Macon, 4**

**LE BONHEUR’S FIRST HEART TRANSPLANT PATIENT**
YOU MAKE US STRONGER

We’ve added 19 new pediatric cardiologists since 2015. Your investment has built one of the nation’s best heart programs.

JUST A CALL AWAY

Because the heart transplant journey is so complex, our families have 24/7 access to a transplant coordinator when they’re at home. Just a call away, the coordinator helps navigate the challenges that come with heart failure.

JUST LIKE ME

Cardiac Kids Camp is a free, week-long camp just for Le Bonheur patients with heart conditions. It’s the first time many kids get to know others with similar medical challenges. Completely donor funded, the camp costs $200 per child. Will you send a kid to camp this summer?

YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE A SCIENTIST TO MAKE A DISCOVERY

When you become a monthly donor, you’re joining a team of people committed to unlocking new treatments for kids. Your gift – as little as $15 a month – fuels research about genetic causes of heart failure and future treatments.

PATIENT ROOMS BECOME CLASSROOMS

We’re home to an accredited school program that provides year-round school services to patients in grades K-12. Our goal is to help children remain on track with school work during long hospitalizations.
The thought of a child sitting in a hospital bed for weeks or months waiting on a heart transplant was almost too much for Karen Fields Isaacman. She thought kids don’t belong in a hospital bed. They should be playing outside, laughing with friends and enjoying meals around the kitchen table.

In 2013, Karen attended a fundraiser for Le Bonheur’s Heart Institute where physicians shared their vision for a world-class pediatric heart program. That night, Karen saw how she could be part of helping heal children. Doctors spoke about a device that is surgically implanted to keep the heart pumping while awaiting a new heart. Called a ventricular assist device (VAD, the mechanical pump is connected to a large machine that allows children to be mobile in the hospital.

“It was hard to imagine that a child had to be confined to their bed during such a hard time while waiting for heart transplant,” Karen said. “It was amazing to me that a mechanical heart could give a child mobility.”

Karen and her husband, Ken Isaacman, made a donation to the Heart Institute to support the purchase of VAD technology.

A few years later, Karen received the best gift – a thank you and hug from a teenager who is alive today because of the VAD. Tyler Smith shared his story at a fundraising event, and Karen was moved to tears.

“Tyler said he would not have made it... he would have died, if he did not have the VAD we donated. It was overly emotional for me to know that I had something to do with saving someone’s life,” Karen said.

Karen says she continues to support the Heart Institute and encourages others to do to the same because “there are more Tylers out there.”
At birth, I was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect (CHD), Tetralogy of Fallot. My parents were given the numbing news that this would require invasive surgery and that there were no guarantees as to how I would respond to this surgical procedure. At 9 months, I underwent surgical correction of my congenital heart defect, and the trajectory of my life took a significant turn.

My childhood was like most children, with the exception of the steady stream of cardiology appointments, images and tests. I grew up not thinking much about my CHD until I was confronted with the harsh reality of its presence in the 7th grade. “You cannot play football!” Those words hung in the air of the school administrator’s office as I wrestled with the reality of my diagnosis. It was tough. I cried. I was so angry and disappointed. I didn’t want to be this way.

However, it was about this time that my pediatric cardiologist asked me to talk to a young family whose son was just diagnosed with a similar congenital heart diagnosis. It was in this conversation with this young family and seeing that young boy that I realized what I wanted to do with my professional career. That encounter was critical, and it gifted me a different perspective that was very much needed.

Today, I am the nurse practitioner for Le Bonheur’s adolescent-adult congenital heart program. Our goal is to help our teenagers and adults realize the importance of life-long cardiac care and partner with them as their primary cardiac care providers. Every day, I get to interact with patients, just like myself, who are confronting the harsh reality of their CHD diagnosis in the context of adulthood. However, I get the distinct pleasure of seeing each and every patient thrive, in his or her own way, even though they have a complex medical condition.

I work within the Le Bonheur Heart Institute because this is where children, like me, get a chance at life. I work with our adolescents and adults because I get to enjoy seeing them live.

This type of life-long cardiac care and support does not happen without the generous support of our Le Bonheur donors. When you commit to “the Heart,” you are partnering with us as we strive to improve the lives of children and adults living with congenital heart disease.
When Katrina Dorse discovered she was pregnant, she was well on her way to building the career she had always wanted in Washington, DC.

“I’d planned and saved so that I could spend a few months at home in Memphis with the baby,” she said. Then, she planned to head back to DC, building a life – graduate school, a job – as a single mom. That’s not how it worked out.

Within hours of Kellen’s birth on April 1, 2016, he was on his way to Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital, where doctors discovered at least seven different heart defects. He spent his first month in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

“He was a full-term baby and looked normal,” she said. “No one mentioned surgery, and certainly the idea of a heart transplant never came up.”

Katrina learned to manage his medications and appointments as they headed home.

One day at Kellen’s cardiology appointment, the doctors told Katrina that his pulmonary valve stenosis had progressed. A cardiac catheterization was scheduled to repair the valve. It didn’t work, and Kellen didn’t recuperate well from the procedure. He was admitted to the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU).

After weeks in the CVICU, Katrina knew the doctors and nurses well.

“When they wanted to do something with Kellen, they’d ask me first,” she said. “They made me feel valued, which helped me trust them more.”

The doctors, too, became trusted partners. Katrina asked

Katrina Dorse’s son, Kellen, is the inspiration behind the Big Heart Fund. Kellen died while waiting for a heart transplant at Le Bonheur.
Pediatric Cardiovascular Chief of Surgery Christopher Knott-Craig, MD, why Kellen wasn’t getting better.

“Nothing prepares you to hear that the only way your child is going to get better is if he gets a new heart,” she said.

Kellen became the first heart transplant candidate at Le Bonheur, since the program relaunched in 2016, after a hiatus.

“There wasn’t another family I could talk to. Kellen’s insurance denied coverage because he was the first. Le Bonheur took care of it all,” Katrina said.

In order for a hospital to receive payment from insurance, transplant centers must be certified by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). However, CMS only approves centers who demonstrate successful outcomes.

“If a hospital wants to start a transplant program, they have to do the first few with no payment. The hospital has to make the transplant investment on the front end and take the risk that it will be certified by CMS,” said Jane Hanafin, senior director of the Heart Institute. “Because of the support of our donors, we were able to be committed and purposeful in our pursuit of a program that will benefit children in heart failure.”

Kellen had three more surgeries in an attempt to get him ready for the transplant, but his condition kept deteriorating.

“The day of the first conversation about the transplant was the last time I saw him smile,” said his mom.

Kellen died Sept. 16, 2016, never having gotten a new heart. He was 5 months old.

“It was a rough journey,” said Katrina. “But we had incredible support from our church and our family. I would see so many families who didn’t have money for gas to get to the hospital, to eat in the cafeteria. There were babies who didn’t have a family member at the bedside because there were three other children and mom had to be at work.”

That’s how the Big Heart Fund was born.

It started out as a small drive for toys for the tiny patients and dinners for their families, in partnership with the Forrest Spence Fund. Soon, though, Katrina realized the need was bigger.

“Congenital heart disease affects one in 100 babies, more than childhood cancer,” she said. “In a room of 100 people, someone was a Kellen.”

The Big Heart Fund’s support has grown from Visa gift cards, gas money, toys and noise machines to drown out the beeping and distractions of the CVICU. Each transplant patient receives a personalized superhero cape – a nod to Kellen who received a similar cape from a nurse honoring his resilience. This spring, Katrina is launching the first parent support group to help these families navigate the unique journey. The first one meets on April 1, which would have been Kellen’s third birthday.

“Katrina is a very special person,” said Knott-Craig, who also serves as executive co-director of the Heart Institute. “She’s able to share with other parents that they are part of a caring team. She’s been there herself, and she can empathize with them.”

“She’s good at making complex ideas easier for parents to understand,” he added. “And not just for parents and families, but also nurses and physicians.”

Katrina’s efforts today are an outpouring of gratitude to the team at Le Bonheur who cared for Kellen.

“So much of what we do now was inspired by the wonderful staff at Le Bonheur. I love to share how that influence has carried me and many other families through so many hard times,” she said.

Kellen’s legacy continues to inspire Katrina – she is now a candidate for a master’s degree in social work at the University of Memphis and continues to build relationships on the cardiology floors at Le Bonheur.

“I always tell parents: You don’t know how strong you are. You can do this,” Katrina said.
Legacy of a Promise
Donors honor work of Le Bonheur’s 8th president, Meri Armour

After 12 years at the helm of Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital, President Meri Armour will retire this spring. During Meri’s tenure, Le Bonheur experienced tremendous growth. A fund has been established to honor Meri’s work at Le Bonheur and support future endeavors.

During her tenure, Le Bonheur built a new hospital, opened FedExFamilyHouse and recruited more than 150 new subspecialists to Memphis. Le Bonheur now has a Top 10 heart program and has been named to U.S. News & World Report’s “Best Children’s Hospitals” list in eight specialties.

The “Legacy of a Promise: the Meri Armour Fund” has been established within Le Bonheur’s endowment fund – a fund Meri started three years ago as a way to secure Le Bonheur’s future. The endowment creates a legacy of perpetual support to ensure that Le Bonheur can grow and serve children today and for years to come.

Read these tributes to Meri from a few people who have given to the endowment fund in her honor.

Meri changed Le Bonheur from a good children’s hospital for Memphis and the surrounding areas, to a great children’s hospital with regional and national recognition as an outstanding place for children to receive care. But as great as these things are, they pale in comparison to what I think is her real impact. Meri showed us all how to work selflessly, how to care for our teammates, and especially how to remain singularly focused on what is best for the children for whom we are privileged to care.

Menti mentored me, sometimes by words, a lot of times just by her actions. By watching her, I saw a leader with character. I saw a leader who was concerned for others. I saw a leader who wanted to raise up those around her. These things, and much more, I try to keep with me daily as I now try to lead others. I still enjoy seeing patients and doing surgery, but because of Meri, my work is much more fulfilling because she taught me what it means to be a leader.

My wife, Julie, and I recognize how important Meri has been to Le Bonheur and the children that depend on the hospital. We want to do our part to ensure that Meri’s legacy will continue to be felt for future generations of children. The children of Le Bonheur, many years from now, deserve to know Meri’s name. We could not be more honored than to be asked to honor her this way.

Mark Williams, MD
Le Bonheur physician, 2002-2015
Surgeon-in-Chief, Levine Children’s Hospital, Charlotte, NC
Chief of Pediatric Urology, Atrium Health

2007
• Meri Armour, MSN, MBA, is named president and CEO of Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital.
• Le Bonheur forms a Family Partners Council to advise hospital leaders and speak on behalf of families to ensure optimal care for patients.

2008
• Le Bonheur breaks ground on a new hospital building.

2009
• FedExFamilyHouse breaks ground to provide a home away from home for out-of-town patient families.

2010
• Le Bonheur opens new 255-bed, $410 million building.
• A new Outpatient Rehabilitation Center opens on Poplar Avenue.
• FedExFamilyHouse hosts its first overnight stay.

2011
• The University of Tennessee and Le Bonheur earn UT Le Bonheur Pediatric Specialists, a physician group of 150 specialists.
• Le Bonheur debuts on U.S. News & World Report’s list of “Best Children’s Hospitals.”

2013
• Le Bonheur becomes first in Tennessee to earn American College of Surgeons Level I pediatric trauma center designation.
• The Children’s Foundation Research Institute at Le Bonheur Children’s launches the first set of RSV antiviral programs in the U.S. since the 2010s.
The potential of any city relies on its future generations. Having a great children’s hospital ensures that promise with its nurturing and curing capabilities. Memphis, in particular, benefits from the renowned LeBonheur Children’s Hospital. In addition, because of its strong relationship with St. Jude, LeBonheur not only has lifted Memphis’ reputation on a local basis but has received national and international acclaim as well. On her arrival to Memphis, Meri recognized that opportunity and has built upon it.

We saw the wonderful work of the whole institution up close when a critical situation faced our family. Millie Galphin weighed 1 lb. 10 oz. when she arrived at LeBonheur. We saw firsthand how the LeBonheur team worked intensely to turn a serious condition into a miracle. Millie recently turned 5 years old. She is a happy and normal little girl enjoying every day of preschool.

Paula and I appreciate good leadership and know that Meri’s impact on LeBonheur and Memphis has been immense. We honor her accomplishments and, more importantly, the passion she has instilled into others.

Bob McEniry
Chairman Emeritus, nexAir
LeBonheur National Leadership Council

Since the very first day Meri began working in the role of president of LeBonheur, her words, actions and communicated vision demonstrated her commitment to the provision of exceptional care for the children who need it. Care that exceeded the norm. Care that only the best medical professionals and clinicians in this country could offer.

I think it would be safe to say that most of us would prefer to be on a winning team and thereby claim bragging rights. What I appreciate most about Meri is that she has created a winning team at LeBonheur. By creating a culture of dignity and respect, being “touchable” and being an integral part of the many best children’s hospital designations we have been awarded, she has well represented all of us at LeBonheur Children’s.

I chose to give to honor her because when she walks through those doors for the last time as president of this hospital, her heart and her mission will linger on.

Janice Ransfer
Clinical Educator
20-year LeBonheur Associate

Please join us in honoring Meri.  www.lebonheur.org/meri
All gifts will be matched by Methodist Healthcare and will be earmarked for Meri’s legacy fund.
The hospital with the big red heart will always hold a special place in the hearts of Brady and Nancy Cook, of Houston, Texas. Because Le Bonheur offered them light during a desperately dark time, giving back is important to the family.

In September 2011, Alyssa Cook’s kindergarten teacher reached out to her parents after she noticed worrisome behaviors. During class or chapel, Alyssa would stand up unexpectedly to twirl and sing. When the behavior was corrected, Alyssa seemed to have no idea what had happened and was confused about why she was in trouble.

After consulting with her pediatrician, Brady and Nancy took Alyssa for an MRI, which showed a seizure-causing tumor in a troublesome location of her brain. Brady and Nancy realized these unusual classroom episodes, along with bouts of staring into space for 20 to 45 seconds at a time, were actually seizures.

Alyssa’s tumor was located near her Broca’s area, a part of the brain that affects speech. The Cooks visited a local neurosurgeon, who believed the tumor was benign and felt surgery was too risky. He recommended treating the tumor with medications.

When medication proved unsuccessful in stopping the seizures, the Cooks began a nationwide search for other options — some more than 1,500 miles from their Houston home. The opinions were inconsistent and offered few answers to the worried parents. Many discouraged surgery because of the tumor’s location.

“We literally felt as if we were racing against time,” said Brady.

Then, online research led them to Le Bonheur and Neuro Surgeon Frederick Boop, MD, co-director of the Neuroscience Institute. Learning about Le Bonheur’s advanced neuroscience technology gave them a renewed sense of optimism. The nine-hour trek from Houston would be worth it to find the care Alyssa needed.

Their first meeting with Boop was drastically different from their previous appointments with neurosurgeons. Boop
not only encouraged the surgery but was also confident he could successfully operate and remove the tumor without affecting Alyssa’s speech.

Le Bonheur is one of the few pediatric neuroscience programs with access to the full range of brain-mapping technology. A multi-disciplinary team interprets the results and provides a blueprint for treatment.

A functional MRI and highly advanced MEG (magnetoencephalography) technology allowed doctors to map Alyssa’s brain in two ways. First, they were able to locate the sources of seizures resulting from the tumor, and then they could map out her brain’s language centers.

They learned that Alyssa was dual-Broca’s, meaning her language generated from both the left and right sides of the brain. Thanks to the mapping technology, they also knew her speech areas allowed for surgery within a one-centimeter margin of the tumor. Along with a running battery of tests, doctors tracked Alyssa’s seizure activity for a few days. After a week of testing and monitoring, they had a plan, and her surgery took place the following week.

A vital tool throughout Alyssa’s surgery was the intra-operative MRI (iMRI), a state-of-the-art machine that allowed the team to perform MRIs during surgery. With this tool, they could monitor the process closely and ensure the entire tumor was removed during one operation. Before Le Bonheur had an iMRI, children would have a follow-up MRI the next day — and some would require another surgery.

Four days later, Alyssa walked out of the hospital on her own.

Eighteen months post-surgery, Alyssa no longer needed seizure medications, and she’s been seizure-free since. Year after year, her follow-up MRIs have been clear, and today she’s an active, happy girl making straight As in school.

**GIVING BACK TO LE BONHEUR**

Although the Cooks know Alyssa’s follow-up scans and tests could be performed closer to home, they can’t imagine going anywhere besides Le Bonheur. Their annual trip from Houston to Memphis is a tradition that’s become special for the family. They eat barbecue, visit the Memphis Zoo and attend church with a family they befriended during their time at Le Bonheur. Then they make their way to the hospital for her yearly check.

Since Alyssa’s successful operation, the Cooks have generously supported Le Bonheur’s Neuroscience Institute. The family named a patient room in the Neuro Intensive Care Unit in honor of Boop and James Wheless, MD, co-directors of the Neuroscience Institute. Another gift supported brain-mapping technology.

“Without the generous and ongoing support of grateful families such as the Cooks, our Neuroscience Institute would not be able to offer these expensive, cutting-edge technologies these children need,” Boop said. “We’re grateful for their support so we can provide excellent care to the children and families who come to us from all over the world.”

The family has also supported the neuroscience endowment fund, so the program can continue to flourish and help children for generations to come. While their decision to give stems from a lifetime of gratitude, they were also encouraged by the ongoing matching gift option from Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare for endowment fund donations.

“The matching gift appealed to us because we could leverage our giving and make it really count,” said Brady.

Brady and Nancy say they will never forget the frightening experience that brought them to Le Bonheur, but they also remember wonderful things, such as the kindness of the doctors and nurses who continually went above and beyond to make sure Alyssa was comfortable and the support and much-needed rest they found at FedExFamilyHouse.

“It’s a place that gave us hope and compassion when we were on our knees. Our result ended up being the best we could have ever hoped for, and we know it doesn’t always end that way,” said Brady. “We needed hope, and anything we can do to help create hope for other people — that’s what’s important for us.”
More Room at the Inn

$12-million expansion triples space for families far from home

Uriah Harlow inspected the holiday decorations. Then, reviewed the books available in the library. Finally, he checked out the bed. The 3-year-old approved.

Uriah and his mom, Sarah, were the first to stay in the new expansion at FedEx-FamilyHouse, which opened in December.

Sarah calls her family “frequent fliers” at Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital. Her son had a heart transplant two years ago. The family lives about two hours away from Memphis in Plantersville, Miss., and FedExFamilyHouse has been their home away from home in Memphis.

“I didn’t have any expectations — it would have been fine just to have somewhere to take a shower and catch a few hours’ sleep,” says Sarah, who was hesitant to leave Uriah by himself in the hospital.

“We walked in, and it’s like this five-star, top of the line … best of the best of everything. I never would have expected to be able to stay somewhere so nice, for nothing,” she says. “And just because somebody donated out of the goodness of their heart, just so families would have a place to stay.”

While no family pays to stay at FedExFamily-House, before December, availability was limited. The house was often at 100 percent capacity with at
Uriah and his mother Sarah were the first family to stay in the new 51-room expansion of FedExFamilyHouse in December.
FedExFamilyHouse at a glance:

- Across the street from the hospital
- 2,623 families served in 2018
- 75 rooms and suites
- 3.5 days average length of stay
- Families from all 50 states and 18 countries served
- No cost to families
- Most referrals come from the Heart Institute, Neuroscience Institute and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

“Take a virtual tour of the house at fedexfamilyhouse.org”

least 30 families on the waiting list each month. Thanks to generous donors, the house opened 51 additional rooms and said goodbye to the waiting list.

The original FedExFamilyHouse opened in 2010 in conjunction with the opening of the new hospital tower across Poplar Avenue. The house was founded by Susan Graf, and her husband, FedEx Corp. Executive Vice President and CFO Alan Graf. As a child, Susan’s brother underwent brain surgery in a hospital 300 miles from home. Susan had a dream to alleviate the burden on families who travel long distances to Le Bonheur and worked with FedEx and hospital leaders to establish the original 24-room facility. It’s the only house in Memphis that provides free lodging to families seeking care at Le Bonheur.

“This is exciting for Susan and me to see. We never imagined we’d be here just a few years later. Starting today, we don’t say ‘no’ anymore,” Alan Graf said at the ribbon cutting event.

Since FedExFamilyHouse opened, more than 160,000 family members have stayed at the house. The lengths of stay range from one night to one year. The growing need for room at the house is linked to the rising national reputation of Le Bonheur. Since 2010, the hospital has gained national recognition on U.S. News & World Report’s Best Children’s Hospitals list. This recognition is a result of the hospital’s ongoing

“It is an incredible place of healing and hope”

Meri Armour
President, Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital
investments in recruitment, technology and research in its premier programs, including the Heart and Neuroscience institutes.

In 2016, FedEx Corporate Vice President Bob Henning and his wife, former Le Bonheur Club President Denise Henning, launched an ambitious fundraising goal of $12 million to expand FedExFamilyHouse.

“There was a clearly a need. Le Bonheur just kept adding tremendous people, great doctors and clinicians. As a result, more families from around the region and across the country sought Le Bonheur’s nationally-recognized care, so there was a need to expand FedExFamilyHouse. It’s a great blessing for the families and children who will receive rest and care here,” Henning said.

And to the families who call FedExFamilyHouse home for a night – or many nights – it is more than a building.

“This isn’t just a residential facility for families who have sick children. It isn’t just a place for people to come and get showered, food and a warm bed,” Le Bonheur President Meri Armour said. “It is an incredible place of healing and hope. It’s a sacred place for all of us because the families who come here leave feeling wrapped in love and supported whether they stay for one day or for one year.”
Family finds comfort, respite during daughter’s 100-hour hospital stay.

Amy Gagel decorated RaeAnn’s room with cards and pictures from family and friends. She painted scripture on the windows.
When Amy and David Gagel first saw RaeAnn’s photo, they knew she would be their daughter. But when they read the physician’s report from China, the Gagels wanted to know more. RaeAnn’s diagnosis: transposition of the great arteries, pulmonary stenosis and ventricular septal defect. What would life look like once RaeAnn was adopted and home in Paragould, Ark.?

Amy started calling children’s hospitals in September 2017. When she spoke on the phone to a cardiologist at Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital in December 2017, she knew she had found the right place.

“My biggest concern was, how do we get her home alive,” Amy said. “We’ve never had a kid who was sick. Do we need oxygen on the plane? How do we maneuver this?” RaeAnn arrived in the United States on Jan. 15, 2018. Three days later, she met her cardiology team at the Le Bonheur clinic in Jonesboro, Ark.

While her first year stateside was filled with learning English and seeing the ocean for the first time, RaeAnn spent nearly a third of the year at Le Bonheur. Her heart condition worsened until she was in heart failure. She had three surgeries and three cath lab procedures. The latest surgery in November repaired her mitral valve and replaced her tricuspid valve.

While 90 minutes from home, the Gagels called FedExFamilyHouse their home away from home.

It’s the only facility in Memphis that provides free lodging to families receiving care at Le Bonheur.

Patient families are referred to the house by their social worker or coordinator.

“When we’re tired and weary we have a place to come that is right across the street from the hospital, and we can sleep without the sounds of beeping monitors. A good night of sleep allowed me to be a better mom to RaeAnn,” Amy said.

The Heart Institute medical staff sees the positive impact FedExFamilyHouse can have on a child’s recovery. “Long-term hospitalization can be a tremendous burden on a child’s family – especially if the hospital is far from home. FedExFamilyHouse alleviates a big burden for our families – and does it in a very comfortable manner. FedExFamilyHouse helps keep families together in a challenging season,” said Heart Institute Co-Director and Cardiovascular Surgeon Christopher Knott-Craig, MD.

RaeAnn is doing well now, but she’ll always need the team at Le Bonheur. The family makes the trip to Memphis regularly for RaeAnn’s check-ups and often stays at the house.
“We can’t take away their pain or worry, but having a place to feel comfortable is so important.”

Diane Haley
When longtime FedEx employee Diane Haley first learned of FedExFamilyHouse, she was touched by the work being done there. She told her husband, Doug, and something began to stir inside them.

The couple felt overwhelmingly grateful for the blessings in their own lives, and they were compelled to find a way to give back. Months went by, but that feeling lingered. Then one day, Diane called FedExFamilyHouse to see if she could plan a Thanksgiving meal.

When she suggested to Doug that they prepare Thanksgiving dinner for the FedExFamilyHouse families, he was shocked, as Diane has never been a cook. Nevertheless, they forged ahead with the idea and began to plan a homecooked Thanksgiving meal.

The Haleys and their children, in-laws and friends, jumped into gear that first year along with other dedicated volunteers. It was such a heartwarming success that Diane realized this could be a family tradition of service.

Though the faces have changed throughout the seven years Diane and Doug have hosted, the dinner has grown each year. They have served anywhere between 30 and 70 people, and they look forward to providing a few worry-free moments for these special families for many years to come.

For Diane, FedExFamilyHouse will always hold a special place in her heart. “It’s a home. It’s not a hotel, but it’s truly a home for these families. We can’t take away their pain or worry, but having a place to feel comfortable is so important. We are no different or special, just blessed and thankful, and we feel honored to serve these families.”

A special thanks to the volunteers who have worked alongside Diane and Doug to make Thanksgiving special at FedExFamilyHouse: Colby Haley, Cali Haley, Rebecca and Zac Carpenter, Butch Haley, Diana Childress, Dianne Provine, Randy and Angie McDowell, Ryan McDowell, Kayla Gallimore, Shelia Cullins and Justice Cullins.
FedExFamilyHouse Is Grateful For Its Gracious Movers and Shakers

The expansion is open! Twins Testimony and Miracle Ayeni add a helping hand to FedExFamilyHouse’s grand opening ceremony for the 51-room expansion. The children were joined by (from left) Cristina and Marc Gasol, Le Bonheur President Meri Armour, their parents Samuel and Mary Ayeni, FedExFamilyHouse founder Susan Graf, Alan Graf, Denise and Bob Henning, and David and Amy Gagel.

FedEx team members are frequently at the house helping restock supplies, preparing meals and moving loads of donations.

FedEx Freight team members made move-in day go quickly. Thanks to the many helpers, the house was ready for families in mid-December.

Tara Burton, CEO of FedEx Employees Credit Association, and fellow team members pause for a selfie before the Hustle for the House run begins.

The first Hustle for the House, a run to benefit FedExFamilyHouse, was a great success. More than 350 runners, walkers, volunteers and sponsors braved the cold weather to help the families who depend on FedExFamilyHouse.
Our donor list is available online at www.lebonheur.org/donorlist.
Four ways to stay cool this summer.

Order today at lebonheur.org/shop
Pumpkin Run

Pumpkin Run 2018 was the best yet! More than 1,600 participants helped raise $100,000 for the children of Le Bonheur while having lots of fun. The post-race boo bash featured a costume contest with prizes for all. Mark your calendars for Oct. 19, 2019!

Dance Marathon

No sleep, no problem! More than 260 Mississippi State University students danced for nine hours straight to support Le Bonheur. Now, in their third year, State Dance Marathon participants raised $93,245 for a great cause.

Enchanted Forest

More than 27,500 people visited the Enchanted Forest Festival of Trees at the Pink Palace in December. Many thanks to everyone who visited and school children from around the region who donated their change. The event raised $245,000 to benefit Le Bonheur.
Upcoming Events

Father Daughter Ball
Mark your calendars for the largest gathering of dancing dads and daughters at the 17th annual Gumtree TWIGS Father Daughter Ball on Saturday, June 22. The evening features dinner provided by Bishops BBQ, a silent auction, creative activities, dancing and special guests including Disney princesses. Presented by Gumtree TWIGS of Le Bonheur, this event sells out so get your tickets at www.lebonheur.org/gumtreeball.

Memphis Food & Wine Festival
Save the date for the 2019 Memphis Food & Wine Festival set for Saturday, Oct. 12, benefiting FedExFamilyHouse. The event celebrates Memphis’ culinary excellence by showcasing exceptional local chef talent along with acclaimed national and international chefs. Enhancing this lineup will be vintners and certified sommeliers. Learn more at www.memphisfoodwinefestival.org.

Gurus of Golf
If you want to join Gurus of Golf on Monday, June 3, act now! The annual Gurus of Golf tournament pairs 20 amateur foursomes with a Top 50 Golf Digest or Top 100 Golf Magazine teaching professional. The pre-event Par-Tee with the Gurus features silent and live auctions that include golf packages and vacations offered and attained by the pros. For more information, contact Joanie Taylor at 901-287-5988 or joanie.taylor@lebonheur.org.
Meet your 2019 Le Bonheur Champions!

They’re #allheart and full of #lebonheurlove.

We recently welcomed our class of 2019 Le Bonheur Champions. You’ll see these awesome kids around the region sharing their Le Bonheur stories and helping raise money for the hospital. You can follow their activities this year on Le Bonheur’s Facebook and Instagram pages.

Left to right: Kyleigh Teeter (Olive Branch, Miss.), AJ Burgess (Memphis, Tenn.), Samuel Marshall (Memphis, Tenn.), Holden Taylor (Memphis, Tenn.), Carter Smith (Germantown, Tenn.), Holden Weatherford (Paragould, Ark.), and Claire Russell (Brownsville, Tenn.).

Not photographed: Leeya Alperin (Germantown, Tenn.), George Brewer (Memphis, Tenn.), Maddeline Flack (Memphis, Tenn.), Katy Mae Knight (Baldwyn, Miss.), Joseph Lea (Brownsville, Tenn.), Isabella Morrow (Starkville, Miss.), Madisen Sago (Southaven, Miss.), Alana Shinabery (Marion, Ark.), and Halle Wildmon (Baldwyn, Miss.).