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Kingswood-Oxford student's efforts, Web site aid Ronald McDonald House

When Kingswood-Oxford School freshman Sam Udolf of West Hartford was a little girl visiting New York City, she took notice of a nearby Ronald McDonald House, curious about its purpose. Her parents explained how the house provided a home away from home for seriously ill children and their families while the children received medical treatment.

This past summer, several years after first learning about RMH, Udolf began volunteering her time at the Springfield, Mass., location. She said she chose the Springfield house because it is one of a handful of Ronald McDonald Houses that operates independently of the larger Ronald McDonald House Charities. According to the Springfield RMH Web site, the location is "sustained by the generous and continuing support of the community."

As part of that community, Udolf and her sister Claudia, a 7th-grader at K-O, visited the house several times during the summer, decorating T-shirts with the children and beautifying the grounds by planting pink and purple flowers.

In August, Udolf started a Web site devoted to raising funds for the house, which is one of nearly 300 in 30 countries across the globe. Udolf's Web site, www.samsraceforaplace.com, has collected more than \$4,600 since launching last month. The site links two of Udolf's passions: her love of skiing and her desire to help others.

She said her time participating in the K-O Middle School community service program, involving activities such as helping at an area soup kitchen, made her realize that she wanted to continue volunteering outside of the School's outreach programs. "With K-O and the volunteering we've done...I just love volunteering," she said.

Udolf also keeps busy skiing. During the winter, she is a member of the K-O ski team, and she also pursues her love of the slopes outside of scholastic competition. She said the competitive ski season of approximately 20 races starts just after Thanksgiving and continues through April. During those events, Udolf dons a racing suit in the RMH trademark colors - golden yellow and red - in an effort to raise awareness for her cause.



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In early August, Udolf presented the house with a check for \$600, money raised from the sale of sweatshirts during last winter's Junior Olympics, in which she participated as a skier. According to Udolf's blog, which can be found on her Web site, that money was significant because it helped her establish Sam's Race for a Place.

Udolf said she has many people to thank for helping her get the project off the ground, including Data-Mail Inc., which donated 5,000 brochures for her effort, and the Dornenburg Group, which designed those brochures and the Web site.

Udolf said she feels blessed that she can make a difference by doing something that she loves. "Hopefully though my efforts and the generosity of others, the house will continue to do the great work it has been doing since 1991," Udolf said. "Now that I have been volunteering regularly, I feel that this experience has not only benefited them but has also enriched my life because it gives me such pleasure to see their joy and know that I am helping make this time in their lives a little easier."