



Times photo by Jerry Harris

Interior designer Valerie McGreevy Tatalovich, Aliquippa, displays her work at Ronald McDonald House.

Home marks decade of McCare

Ronald McDonald House renovated by local woman

By Pam Horter
Times Correspondent

The Ronald McDonald House on Shady Avenue in Pittsburgh celebrated 10 years of service to more than 7,500 families of seriously ill children on Monday.

Located in the city's Shadyside section, the three-story Victorian building is newly renovated in conjunction with the first decade of the facility, which provides a place to stay for critically ill children and their families. Aliquippa resident Valerie McGreevy Tatalovich provided the interior design.

The original building comprised 10 bedrooms, five baths, an entry hall, the house manager's apartment, the weekend manager's suite, a living room and common areas. In 1983, an extension was built to provide six more bedrooms.

"Families from all parts of the tri-state area, and from states as far as California and Oregon, travel a great distance to come to Pittsburgh to be at the side of children who are being hospitalized for cancer, leukemia and other life-threatening diseases, as well as for organ transplants," said Robert Hoffman, president of the board of directors of Children's Oncology Services of Pittsburgh Inc., the non-profit operating agency of the Ronald McDonald House.

"... It is the objective of the Ronald McDonald House to be a comfortable alternative to hotel and motel rooms by provid-

ing homey, temporary living quarters which allow family members to be together during hospitalization," said Hoffman.

To accomplish that objective, Children's Oncology Services set out to renovate the original structure in conjunction with the 10th anniversary of the Ronald McDonald House.

"We selected Valerie McGreevy Tatalovich as the interior designer because she had the approach we were looking for," said Hoffman.

The Aliquippa resident said: "The goal of the project was the comfort of the families who stay at the Ronald McDonald House. I wanted to do anything I could to make life easier for them. I wanted the house to emit feelings of warmth, relaxation and love."

A graduate of West Virginia University with a degree in home economics and extra credits in interior design, Tatalovich said she inherited her interest and flair for interior design from her mother and grandmother.

One of 10 daughters born in a coal-mining family in McDonald, Pa., her mother told her stories of her grandmother's skill at making a modest home a place of beauty and comfort. She made curtains from flour sacks, braided rugs and dyed her own cloth.

After graduating from college, Tatalovich taught home economics at Baldwin High School and, later, interior design at the Wheeler School in Pittsburgh and at Community College of Beaver County. She enjoyed teaching because it gave her latitude to explore the five areas of home economics: interior design, food and nutrition, textiles and clothing, child development and family management.

Tatalovich's first business venture was Valerie M. Interiors of Center Township, a shop that featured floor, wall and window coverings. She then worked for six years as

interior designer for Kaufmann's in downtown Pittsburgh.

Before bidding on the Ronald McDonald House renovation project last summer, Tatalovich had a professional interest in the building. While living for three years near the Shadyside facility, she dreamed about redesigning the three-story Victorian building.

After being awarded the project in September 1988, Tatalovich made family comfort her first objective. She wanted to choose colors that would enhance that feeling. She also wanted to use the ambiance of the elegant Victorian building, while at the same time avoiding the oppressiveness sometimes associated with the Victorian period.

Her second consideration was floor space. Each of the 10 small bedrooms had to contain several pieces of furniture — dressers, night tables, chairs, beds, cribs and a sink.

"The biggest difficulty was the rerouting of plumbing and wiring through very thick old walls and floors," Tatalovich said.

The result are renovated rooms that are warm, elegant and void of institutionalism. Peach, burgundy, pink and blue colors provide a relaxed and refined atmosphere in which Victorian motifs are present but not overpowering.

Prints featuring children at play, love and domestic tranquility evoke a homey mood. Each bedroom has a different color scheme, and placement of furniture and accessories provide flexibility and character to the sleeping quarters.

"I believe I've accomplished my goals and that a lot of prayers have been answered. As the Ronald McDonald House moves into its second decade, it can continue to be a haven of comfort for families who are experiencing very troublesome times," Tatalovich said.