

## KALAS

From Page D1

exclaims with a flashbulb smile and no little pride.

I've met people like her before. I've heard words like those before. And I confess my reaction is always a polite, skeptical curiosity.

A variation on the theme is when consoling a heartbroken, discarded husband or wife, well-meaning people will often coo, "Well, maybe you can be friends."

Like, that's the target. That's the goal. Like, it's always possible. And in every case desirable.

Hmm. The person that could not or would not but for sure did not endure with you in the work of marriage might nonetheless endure with you in the rigor and work and joy of friendship.

A man in my office once said, wryly, in response to the "maybe you can be friends" encouragement, "I pick better friends than that."

I swear I'm not cynical about post-love-affair or postmarital friendships. They are possible. My son is proof of this. But I am still hesitant and wanting to examine. I have questions, like ...

If you can turn on a metaphorical dime and convert a love relationship into a friendship, it makes me wonder if you were all that deeply invested in the first place. I take as given that great love is powerful and life-changing. That it requires a trembling, gaping vulnerability. That, if for whatever reason the relationship ends, it would take most people a couple of years or at least several months of carefully guarded distance before we could just stand in a room and "make normal," let alone consider investing in a friendship.

I wonder if some people recover a real friendship, but if other people are simply posturing an understandable self-assuagement. In a world of crumbling marriages and the pain of divorce, I wonder if it makes us feel better about ourselves to talk of friendship.

And, if indeed your ex is today one of your best friends, it seems reasonable to wonder why you divorced at all. I mean, for those lucky enough to reach their 80s in a terrific marriage of 40 to 60 years, I imagine that friendship is the abiding, lasting core of their communion.

I'm not being critical, just curious: If you were/are such buddies, I wonder why the friendship didn't provide a tether while you addressed, healed and reconciled whatever was threatening or eroding the marital promise.

Friends? Do you mean friends? Or do you more mean you have made an authentic peace with your estranged mate. You have forgiven and been forgiven. You have surrendered enmity and wounded pride. These are good things. But such sublime victories in no way mean that we are participants in an active friendship.

I wonder, once you were totally exposed in a marriage, wouldn't some part of you need, once divorced, to be rightly guarded and "covered" in the presence of the same person?

And lastly, how do you define "friend." I know I'm a dinosaur, but I still reserve that word for something significant and even profound.

If you're one of the first four to six people I call when my mother dies, or when I become a grandfather, or when I win the lottery, then you can bet you're in my inner circle.

You are a covenant friend.  
— Steven Kalas is a behavioral health consultant and counselor at Las Vegas Psychiatry and the author of "Human Matters: Wise and Witty Counsel on Relationships, Parenting, Grief and Doing the Right Thing" (Stephens Press). His column appears on Mondays. Contact him at 702-227-4165 or [skalas@reviewjournal.com](mailto:skalas@reviewjournal.com).

## HOME

From Page D1

corporate donor, and we wouldn't be here without them, but the vast majority of our operating revenue comes from this community," McCarthy said.

Greater Las Vegas franchise owners donate "that little vital piece of real estate on the counter" for the Ronald McDonald House donation collection box. McDonald's customers slip their leftover change into the boxes, and the almost unconscious donation of those coins adds up to a significant contribution of approximately \$250,000 a year.

One hundred percent of all private donations and money raised by more than 40 community partners of the Ronald McDonald House remain within the greater Las Vegas area.

No families are turned away for an inability to pay.

"We ask people for \$10 a night, but 76 percent of them cannot pay," McCarthy said. "That money is going to co-pay, paying their bills back home, and at least one income is usually lost (because a parent is in Las Vegas with his or her child.) Days, weeks, months and, worst-case scenario, years (of medical treatment away from home) — that family is wiped out (financially) for at least five years," she said.

The 24-hour, seven-days-a-week operation has only eight full-time and four part-time staff and could not keep its doors open without the support and dedication of 50 to 60 core volunteers who donate at least one hour a week of their time, said Missy Check, director of marketing and special events at the Ronald McDonald House.



**Camille de Leon sits with son Anthony and daughter Rosie at the Ronald McDonald House in Las Vegas. The Reno family has been living in the home since March, after Anthony was diagnosed with a rare form of renal cancer that is being treated in Las Vegas.**

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Volunteers Susan Viola, 50, and Shari Young, 62, came to the house for different reasons, but helping others was the goal of both of the women.

After the death of Viola's husband in 2013, "I needed to find a meaningful way to fill the hole in my heart," she said. Her late husband had always donated to children's charities, so "I specifically sought out the RMH to see how we could have a mutually beneficial relationship," said Viola, now the jack-of-all-trades volunteer.

Many parents spend long days and evenings at their child's bedside. Ronald McDonald House volunteers like Young bring lunches to the families in the hospital.

"Now that person doesn't have to leave their sick child's side to go get something to eat, or maybe they just don't have the money to get something to eat — or maybe that might

be their only meal — the one that we deliver them," Young said. "To know that I'm part of that and maybe made their day just a little bit easier, that's a great feeling."

McCarthy said the Ronald McDonald House will need the help of at least 30 community volunteers who are willing to commit to regular shifts and go through required hospital and house training when the facility's new Family Room inside Sunrise Hospital opens Sept. 30.

"That means having boots on the ground right at the hospital every day," McCarthy said.

The Ronald McDonald House Family Room will offer a special place of calm respite, yet parents remain only steps away from their child's bedside. The hospital has leased the space at no cost to the organization for five years.

"Some people don't like to even walk into hospitals," McCarthy said. "We are the anti-hospital. When you walk through (the new Family Room) doors, you're going to feel like you are anywhere but a hospital."

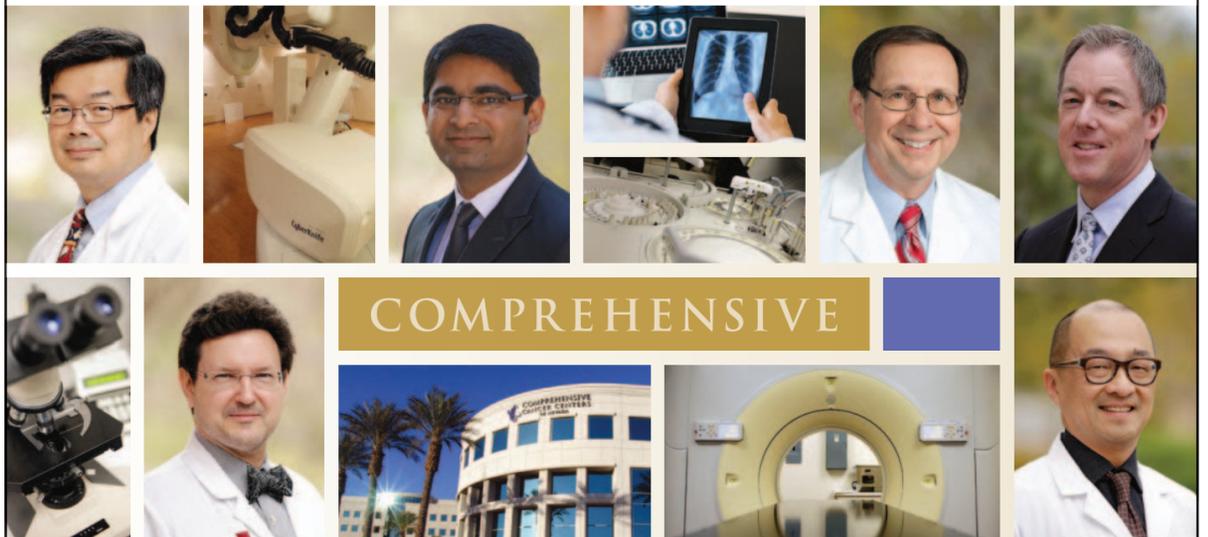
The new facility will make a big difference to families like Anthony's. People will be able to learn about the support that the Ronald McDonald House can offer them so they can be strong for their child, Check said.

Anthony's family is grateful they found out about the Ronald McDonald House during this stressful time of their lives.

"We just know that without the help of the Ronald McDonald House, we wouldn't know what to do," de Leon said. "They are like family to us now, and we'll be forever grateful for their help."

— For more information: [www.rmhlv.com](http://www.rmhlv.com) or call: 702-252-4663

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