



By Richard Childress—Evening Sun Staff

Frank Staines, a painter, puts some of the finishing touches on the Ronald McDonald House as the staff prepares to open the facility today.

# Ronald McDonald House opening, is tribute to late Billy Ehrman

By Michele Singletary  
Evening Sun Staff

The golden arches are absent but Ronald McDonald isn't.

The moppy red-haired clown has taken his honorary place in a corner of the playground at the Ronald McDonald House scheduled to open today.

Efforts to build the house, located at Lexington and Arch streets, were sparked by Joe Ehrman, former defensive tackle for the Colts, in 1978 after his brother died of aplastic anemia, the loss of red blood cells from a malfunction of the bone marrow.

The house opens on what would have been Billy's 23rd birthday. It is the 33rd house of its kind nationally to offer lodging to families whose children face life-threatening diseases.

After Billy's death, HOSS (Hema-

tology-Oncology Support Services) was formed to help in building Baltimore's \$1.2 million house, and Ehrman became the driving force in raising some of the initial funds needed.

For 2½ years, local organizations worked to open the house for children under treatment at Baltimore-area hospitals.

Baltimore's Ronald McDonald House, one of the largest of the houses now serving 250,000 families, contains 26 bedrooms, of which eight units are available to the handicapped, four kitchens, two dining rooms and common living and recreation rooms.

The contemporary home, designed by Gilbert Thomas of Marks, Cooke, Schack, Thomas Inc., features skylights, elevators and large rooms with ample space for families.

Each floor has a central atrium where families will meet for meals.

Ann Eikenburg, resident manager, said the dining areas and recreation rooms are centrally located so families can draw strength from other families experiencing the same problems.

"It is an important concept that the families communicate. They have a chance to see that they are not alone and other families are in the same situation," Eikenburg said.

Eikenburg and her husband, Paul, will live in the house and help to keep a network of communication going between the families. A staff of more than 30 volunteers also will be on hand.

While children receive treatment at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and University Hospital, a van service will be available to transport families to and from the hospitals.

Since the home was built to reduce the cost of living in a hotel or motel, there is a minimal charge of \$10 a night per family, and \$8 for additional nights. In the case of families who cannot afford the fee, there is no charge.

Maria Cohen, secretary for the board of directors for HOSS, said the money paid will help cover utilities.

To date, \$600,000 has been raised with a additional \$40,000 coming from local fund-raising projects handled through McDonald's restaurants. The land was leased from the University of Maryland for \$1 a year for 99 years.

"We have about half the funds needed for the house, and for the next 10 years we will have to continue our efforts to keep the house going," Cohen said.