

2010 Scholarship for Outstanding Service Recipient *Chris Martz of New Braunfels*

“Never give up. Never let someone else set your limits.” Christopher Martz exhibits a perseverance few others in his circumstances would. After suffering a traumatic brain injury from a car accident that killed his father and injured his mother and sisters, Chris chose to use his recovery not as an excuse, but as a springboard for service.

A Ronald McDonald House in Nevada was home for Chris’ mother and sisters during his six-month recovery. After starting high school in San Antonio, Chris noticed a Ronald McDonald House just up the street. At first his plan was to just help clean the facility. As he interacted with the children and families living there Chris decided to create a project that would make life a little easier for them while also helping him recover.

One day, while talking to a boy staying at the Ronald McDonald House, the child mentioned that he didn’t think Santa knew where he lived anymore because he hadn’t received Christmas presents in a few years. Despite the fact Chris was still struggling to regain his speech, short-term memory and many other everyday skills, he forged ahead with his plan to make Christmas a happier time for those staying at the Ronald McDonald House over the holidays.

Recruiting help from the business community and students at his high school, Chris provided gifts for 100 families living in Ronald McDonald House the first year. Four years later, Chris organizes a group of 200 volunteers and works with dozens of businesses and civic groups to bring Christmas to families staying at Ronald McDonald Houses throughout South Texas.

“I have learned my community has a big heart,” says Chris. Because the community is more aware of the impact Ronald McDonald House has on the lives of families, many local businesses now donate their time and resources year round to supporting the work of Ronald MacDonal House.

Chris admits, “I have been dramatically changed by the events of the past five years. The project changed my perspective and gave me more time to focus on what I needed to do for others, and while I was working on creating the project, [I] found myself.”

Chris doesn’t underestimate the effect his project has on his peers, who have pledged to continue his work as he heads off to college next year. “In the past four years, I have had students leave Ronald McDonald House crying, some tears of joy, some tears of realization that they had done something that actually changed the life of another human being.” I know “it has made me a better man.”