

Upgrade at Ronald McDonald House Keeps Families Connected

High-bandwidth copper wiring provides faster and more reliable service

At the Longfellow Park home, it's not uncommon to see a family huddled around the computer taking turns typing away at the keyboard and smiling for the person on the other end.

For the sick or injured children staying at the Longfellow and Cherry Street facilities in Kansas City, MO, which are both owned and operated by the Ronald McDonald House Charities, the Internet represents a critical communications lifeline to their extended families back home.

No matter the time of day, you can always find a person logged onto one of the desktop computers in the communal living space, or connected to a laptop in their own bedroom of the house, said Holly Buckendahl, the CEO and executive director of the Ronald McDonald House Charities.

"Childhood illness presents unpredictable challenges, and it is imperative that families have access to computers and internet services to easily and quickly foster connectivity with family and friends," said Buckendahl. "Families regularly check e-mail, view Skype, and post information on their Caring Bridge and Facebook pages for support and to update others on the status of their child. The Internet is also a powerful tool for parents to research medical treatment information, as well as to access online support groups. "

This is why the upgrade to the wiring system at the Longfellow house was so very much appreciated by the staff and the resident guests, she added.

"High-bandwidth copper wiring (Category 5e or better) was chosen for the Longfellow house because it's faster and more reliable than standard telephone cable and can handle multiple IP-phone lines and support high-speed internet access," said Lindsay Allen, VP of Marketing for Superior Essex Communications LP, the company which manufactured the copper wiring. "It's one of the best options to carry voice, data and other services from where they enter the house/building to every room."

All Ronald McDonald Houses in the U.S. are equipped with Wi-Fi service, provided free of charge by AT&T. When they're not chatting with friends and family, the children also use the Internet to keep up with their school work and receive online tutoring. This couldn't have been possible without the home being wired for Internet, allowing the children and their families to get online freely from virtually any point of the house.

There could be as many as 60 families staying at both facilities at any given time. On average, 125 people could be living in the homes temporarily while their loved ones receive medical care at Children's Mercy Hospital for cancer, are on a wait list for an organ transplant or are strong enough to go home after a premature birth.

While the average stay is 5 to 9 days, some families will remain at the home for up to a month in one of the long term suites. A smaller percentage, about 5- to 6-percent, may stay for several months including up to a year. A majority of the families are from Missouri or neighboring Kansas (2 to 3 hours away), but the Longfellow house opened its doors to visitors from 25 different states last year, added Buckendahl.

Internet access points were installed in each bedroom as well as four Internet connection sites in the family room. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and Internet access were also added to the staff offices.

Teague Electric installed a hardware solution composed of 50,000 feet of CAT 5e and CAT 3 copper cabling and 62.5 Multimode Fiber Optics Cable manufactured by Superior Essex.

By installing this copper cabling system, the system is guaranteed to meet IEEE 802.3ab Bit Error Rate requirements, and guaranteed to support current and future applications designed for CAT 5e, including Voice over IP and Power over Ethernet.

For more information about copper cabling, visit www.copper.org.