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St. Jude's mourns longtime supporter Ed McMahon



JEAN REID NORMAN

A memorial to Ed McMahon's son Michael McMahon, who died of cancer in 1995 at age 44, sits on the south portion of St. Jude's Ranch for Children with a view of Lake Mead. Michael volunteered at the home for abused and neglected children in Boulder City for a year, and Ed McMahon was a strong supporter of the facility.

By **Jean Reid Norman (contact)**
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Longtime "Tonight Show" sidekick, corporate spokesman and emcee Ed McMahon, who died Tuesday, has left behind a strong legacy at St. Jude's Ranch for Children in Boulder City, the home for abused and neglected children.

"Ed McMahon was a longtime and very generous supporter of children," Executive Director Christine Spadafor said. A building at St. Jude's where children receive therapy is named for him, she said.

McMahon died early Tuesday in Los Angeles at the age of 86, the Associated Press reported.

McMahon was instrumental in the fundraising that helped found St. Jude's, said Spadafor and the Rev. Herbert Ward, longtime director of the facility until his retirement 10 years ago.

"I can say without contradiction that if Ed had not been committed and involved in St. Jude's, there probably would not be a ranch today," Ward said. "He was the Pied Piper who brought in all of the donations."

McMahon performed in St. Jude's annual Nite of Stars fundraiser in 1975 and 1983, but even when he wasn't performing, Ward said, McMahon encouraged other Strip performers to donate their talent. He also spread the word about the Boulder City facility.

"Nobody in the country knew about St. Jude's until Ed McMahon let his name be attached to it," Ward said. That included a letter he sent to news organizations letting them know about St. Jude's. Articles in several national publications resulted, Ward said.

McMahon's son Michael, whom Ward described as a "gentle giant," volunteered at the ranch for about a year, Ward said.

After Michael McMahon died of cancer, Ed McMahon and his wife had a memorial built in his honor at the south end of the ranch property, overlooking Lake Mead.

Until his health declined after he broke his neck in 2007, Ed McMahon would come spend time at the memorial every time he was in town, Spadafor said. His limousine would slip in the back entrance of the ranch unannounced, and staff members would see him leave quietly.

Spadafor said staff members would be asked this week to tell the children currently at the ranch about McMahon's passing and "talk about how wonderful Mr. McMahon was and how he made their lives better."

Ward said McMahon, a former Marine, was always humble about his celebrity status.

"He said to me on a number of occasions that God had blessed him," Ward said. "He said, 'I never thought I'd be doing this, but the good Lord loves me.'"



Ed McMahon and Johnny Carson on NBC's *The Tonight Show With Johnny Carson*.

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