

# A Game Changer

## A Family's Story

65 steps. The new mother counted them just as surely as new parents count 10 fingers and 10 toes. Those 65 steps from the newborn intensive care unit to the **Ronald McDonald Family Room** in Odessa's Medical Center Hospital gave her newborn, premature twins a chance to thrive and kept her safely on this side of exhaustion.

The short trip down the hall became part of the rhythm of life for Maria Elena and Kevin Rimer after their twins John and Harrison were born on Feb. 6, at only 6 1/2 months. They each weighed slightly over 2 pounds. The proximity of the **Ronald McDonald Family Room** where Maria Elena stayed for 11 weeks after the twins' birth made it possible for the boys to receive kangaroo care.



*"It was a game changer,"* Maria Elena said. "I can't stress this enough. They thrived because of all this contact."

The **Ronald McDonald Family Room** in Odessa is part of **Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Southwest**, which serves families of hospitalized children birth to 21 years of age.

With the Family Room steps away, the Rimers were able to care for their twins in the intensive care nursery. They held them with skin-to-skin contact on their chests under a baby blanket, creating a pouch like a kangaroo's. The Family Room allowed her to do this for as many hours a day as possible with breaks to shower, nap, do laundry, and grab a bite to eat.

"When they tell you this is what you have to do, any mom would do it," she said.

The benefits of providing the kangaroo care showed up almost immediately. The babies' heart rates began to stabilize. Their breathing became more regular and their oxygen-saturation levels went from 80 to 100 percent, Maria Elena said. They slept more, cried less and gained weight faster.

It had been a very long road for the Rimers leading to the birth of their sons. "Two doctors over 10 years told us conceiving would be impossible," Maria Elena said. "Then we went to a fertility specialist, and I miscarried twice. We were hesitant to keep trying until the results of another procedure indicated that I could carry a baby, but in-vitro-fertilization would be necessary," explained Maria Elena. "We prayed and decided to try IVF."

At six weeks after the in-vitro-fertilization, the Rimers heard two sets of heartbeats. At 13 weeks, Maria Elena was put on bed rest. At 20 weeks, her body showed signs of preparing for labor, but doctors were able to delay it until 27 weeks when the boys were born in an emergency C-section.

"My doctor told me to share our story," she said. "It's a story of hope, faith and love."

She is thankful to Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Southwest, which also supports and offers these services at Ronald McDonald Family Rooms in Covenant Children's Hospital and University Medical Center in Lubbock.

"It was possible because of the resources the **Ronald McDonald Family Room** provided," Maria Elena said. "It makes a real difference" she added.