

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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# **MCH Resident Finds Her ‘Voice’ with AI**

Debbie Lopez has always been a storyteller.

Whether reading bedtime books to her three children or documenting her medical journey on YouTube, she always found comfort and power in her voice.

But in 2019, everything changed when she was diagnosed with ALS—a progressive neurodegenerative disease that has gradually stripped her ability to do the things many take for granted, like getting a glass of water or chatting with friends.

At first, the signs were subtle: a weakened arm while nursing her son and persistent muscle spasms. Left frustrated by the unknown, Debbie endured months of uncertainty before finally receiving a diagnosis.

“We don’t have any advancements or treatments, and ALS families need support,” Debbie says. “It has broken everyone who loves me and everyone I love. But it hasn’t broken me, because my faith keeps me strong. I get to see the best in everyone.”

Despite losing her ability to speak, Debbie refused to be silenced. In February, she arrived at Monroe Community Hospital (MCH)—one of only a few facilities in the Greater Rochester area equipped to care for patients with ALS. What she found was more than just medical care; she found an extended family.

“She’s so strong, so determined,” says Jaime Spencer, a speech-language pathologist at MCH. “Debbie has the most contagious smile. She lights up the room and always tries to lift others up—even when facing something as isolating as ALS.”

Debbie now uses a specialized eye-gaze communication device to express her needs. With just the movement of her eyes, she can write, text, call, and even blog. But no

matter how advanced the technology, the robotic voice it used never truly captured *her*.

That changed when Jaime introduced her to a groundbreaking AI solution. Partnering with the nonprofit Bridging Voices and voice software powered by Eleven Labs—and supported by the MCH Foundation—they were able to recreate Debbie’s natural voice using samples from her *Living with Lemons* YouTube vlog.

It was an emotional milestone neither of them will forget.

“I walked into her room and said, ‘We got your voice working,’” Jaime recalls. “Then I played her introduction: ‘Hi, this is Debbie Lopez. Welcome to *Living with Lemons*.’ She had tears in her eyes. She said, ‘Oh my God, it’s really me.’”

Now, anything Debbie types into her device can be spoken in her own voice. The quotes in this article were recorded using that software. She even surprised her oldest daughter on her 17th birthday with recordings of her reading beloved childhood books, *Love You Forever* and *The Color Wizard*.

“I want people to know that even if I can’t make a sound,” Debbie says, “I still have a voice. And even though my forecast is cloudy and gray... I can still share my colors with the world.”

Living with ALS has taken much from Debbie and her family. But thanks to Monroe Community Hospital, the dedication of caregivers like Jaime, and the power of technology, one thing it could never take is her voice—or the love she shares with those around her.

“This team has helped me find a new home away from home and showed me that I have a bigger family,” Debbie says. “I appreciate everyone who has helped me and everyone who shows me care. That’s the best thing about being in the most awful position—you really get to see the best of humanity. I’m proud of the community I live in, and I’m really proud that I chose MCH to be my final home.”

## **T. FRANKLIN WILLIAMS, MD/MCH FOUNDATION**

When ALS threatened to silence Debbie Lopez, Monroe Community Hospital (MCH) turned to innovative AI technology to help the mother of three regain her voices. It's a project possible only with the support of the **T. Franklin Williams, MD/MCH Foundation**. To help support resident independence, please donate to the MCH Foundation at <https://www.monroehosp.org/foundation-donation>.

### **About MCH**

Monroe Community Hospital is the 17th largest skilled nursing facility in the country, providing high-quality long-term and rehabilitation care to individuals with complex and chronic health conditions. The county-owned facility has 566 skilled nursing beds and is home to residents of all ages — from infants to centenarians. For more information, visit [MonroeHosp.org](http://MonroeHosp.org) or follow Monroe Community Hospital on social media.

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Debbie Lopez