



Home Away from Home

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

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Message from the President



It's hard to believe another year has gone by, and as we all know too well, much of it continuing under the cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not to worry! We managed to not

only survive, but to actually thrive quite well this past year. You'll enjoy reading about the record attendance at our 9th Annual Fisher House WI Golf Outing later in this newsletter. A week after our golf outing, Bill Michael's Annual Poker Run motorcycle ride also drew a record number of riders. Earlier in the summer, the Fisher House team of walkers and runners did a great job supporting Brewers Community Foundation's 5k Famous Racing Sausages Run/Walk once again.

All of this activity speaks to the strong support that Fisher House Wisconsin receives throughout the year. Perhaps the best part is that we can share our passion for the mission of Fisher House with Veterans and their families who join us at events like the walk/run, golf outing, and the motorcycle ride. The stories told during those events are ones of shared experiences and deep gratitude.

As we finish out the year, we will be saying farewell to long time board member Elliot LePoidevin who completes his second full 3-year term on December 31, 2021. Elliot joined the board in July 2015 and became our Treasurer shortly thereafter in January 2016. As Treasurer, he led us in solidifying all accounting procedures, including our annual audit and tax filings and more. We'll miss you, Elliot!

Joining the board in January 2022 will be Tim La Sage of Johnson Creek, WI. Tim is currently the Military Affairs Manager for WPS Health Solutions. He is a 22 year Veteran of the Marine Corps, serving as a Scout Sniper with multiple combat awards and Purple Heart Medals. It is

an understatement to say that we are honored that he is willing to continue serving Veterans and their families as a member of our board. Welcome, Tim!

I'm proud to make two other board announcements:

Chuck Steinmetz, General Manager of WITI Fox 6 has been a valued member of our board since January 2019, and he has agreed to accept the board's nomination to be our next Vice President. Chuck brings a strong commitment and servant leadership attitude to all he does, and we are grateful for his willingness to take on additional responsibilities for Fisher House Wisconsin.

I'm also delighted to announce that long time board member Angie Christianson will become our President on January 1, 2022! Angie's energy and enthusiasm for "all things Fisher House" is evident from the first time you meet her, whether volunteering at the house or at the golf course. No, she doesn't golf – but she IS the driving force behind our extremely successful string of 9 annual golf outings. I'm delighted to be handing over the reins to her and I'm extremely confident in the ongoing support we will provide our Veterans and their families under her leadership.

It has been my pleasure and truly an honor serving Fisher House Wisconsin as President these past two years. We are on a great path with the second house soon to be built in Madison and a strong strategic plan to support both houses, Veterans and their families. There is no question we, all of us, are making a difference in the lives of those who have given us so much and to whom we will always owe an eternal debt of gratitude. Thank you for your strong support and generosity!

—Dirk Debbink, President

Stationed for Good

The Station Pub & Grill dedicates years of fundraising efforts to Fisher House of Wisconsin



The Station Pub and Grill held its 4th annual golf outing in August at Naga-Waukeee War Memorial Golf Course. The event has raised about \$15,000 over the years with efforts benefiting veterans and their families served through Fisher House Wisconsin. About 112 golfers participated in the event, including (pictured from right) MGySgt John Purcell, Sgt Dave Perretz, Col Dave Fallon, and CPL Dave Hoffmann.

By Rebecca Seymour

When Gregory and Linda Zinda and their son Jason and daughter-in-law

Danielle bought The Station Pub & Grill in Pewaukee from a family friend in 2017, there was already a tradition set in place for fundraising for veteran's organizations.

"We wanted to keep it rolling, but we wanted to focus on something more local. Our friend who is a Marine veteran suggested Fisher House," explained Danielle. "I wanted to see what the Fisher House was all about, so I took a tour and ended up staying for an hour talking to vets. This is a really cool place."

This last August, the Zinda family were joined by 112 golfers for the 4th Annual Station Pub & Grill golf outing at Naga-Waukeee War Memorial Golf Course. The event has raised about \$15,000 over the years with efforts benefiting veterans and their families served through Fisher House Wisconsin.

"We have a lot of love for people that we meet every day who have ties to the military, so it's a really proud moment when we total up all the money that was raised. They are our regular customers,



Gregory and Linda Zinda and their son Jason and daughter-in-law Danielle own The Station Pub & Grill in Pewaukee and are dedicated to honoring and supporting people who are currently serving in the military, as well as veterans. (Pictured are Jason and Gregory Zinda).

our friends and family. They helped us, especially after this last year. We couldn't have made it without them," added Danielle.

Gregory Zinda served in the U.S. Air Force – his son Jason was born and raised on the base in Texas.

"I felt like I was home when I was touring the Fisher House facility in Milwaukee. It was such a comforting feeling, and it became so personal," said Danielle. "It's inspiring to know that everything we are doing with our golf outing is going to people who really need help."

RAISING A CUP TO THE COLONEL

McKeown family's annual golf outing pays tribute to USAR veteran husband and father

By Rebecca Seymour

Over the last five years, the McKeown family has been holding the Colonel's Cup golf outing, raising \$4,565 dedicated to Fisher House Wisconsin. For Kathleen McKeown of Pewaukee and her children Brigid and Casey McKeown of Wauwatosa, the annual event is also a way to honor husband and father, Colonel William "Bill" D. McKeown.

Bill served in the United States Army Reserves, attaining the rank of Colonel. He retired from the USAR in 2002 as Chief of Staff of the 84th Division (TNG). His awards include the Army

Commendation Medal, Meritorious Service Medal and Legion of Merit.

"Casey and I started the golf outing in the fall of 2014, a few months after Dad died, originally as a way to get together to remember Dad since golf was something he loved doing with friends and family," said Brigid.

When he was alive, Bill was active in helping to raise money for Fisher House, along with some others from his division, which is why his family chose to make the nonprofit organization the beneficiary of the funds raised each year through the golf outing.

"Bill wanted everyone to know about Fisher House and how wonderful it is to have one in Milwaukee. There were many USAR occasions where donation requests were made for Fisher House. When Bill came to the end of his life's journey, he wanted his friends and family to remember



Colonel William "Bill" D. McKeown in uniform at a Milwaukee Bucks game.

the importance of Fisher House when they remembered him," wrote Bill's wife, Kathleen.

Continued on next page

A Rare Opportunity

By Andrea Potthast

Fisher House Wisconsin recently started a collaboration with Buffalo Trace Distillery to raise funds. Buffalo Trace Distillery, the oldest continuous operating distillery in American has been making legendary bourbon whiskey for more than 200 years, so we were thrilled when Fisher House Wisconsin was selected for the opportunity to pick our very own barrel of Eagle Rare Bourbon which will be bottled and sold to benefit Fisher House Wisconsin.

The first and most important task was to select the barrel. This once-in-a-life time experience was auctioned off to the highest bidder. It took a group of Fisher House Wisconsin supporters from Wisconsin to Kentucky, the heart of bourbon country. The group include Dirk Stallman, Mark Stallman, Tom Balla, Brian and Michelle Feebler, and Andrew and Cortney Roberts.

Late Friday morning on November 5th, the group headed out to the distillery to meet the team at Buffalo Trace. The behind-the-scenes tour started at "Bourbon Pompeii", the location of a large fermenter and the original site of a fermenter built in 1883. The site had long been forgotten until 2016 when it was discovered while digging during renovations. The discovery of this archeological site is why the Buffalo Trace team named this building "Bourbon Pompeii". This is just one of many ways history is recorded and preserved at the distillery.

After touring through the production facilities, the group continued to the famous Warehouse H. This is the home of the original single barrel bourbon whisky - Blanton's. Albert Blanton was president of the distillery from 1921 to 1952. He stored his private reserve in the brick Warehouse H. (I like to imagine him sharing some of his private reserve with the U.S. Military Service Veterans of that era.) This is the location that the group would do the actual barrel pick as a homage to the first single barrel bourbon released commercially. The room, which was filled with the aroma of oak wood and bourbon, fully immersed the group in the history of the distillery.



To begin the barrel pick, just four barrels from the many rows of barrels were rolled out in front of the group. Armed with tasting glasses, note cards, and all the time in world the group started their task. Carefully evaluating each for best taste, aroma, appearance, and finish, they first narrowed down to two barrels by each voting for their favorites. That was followed by a blind tasting of samples from the two remaining barrels. Surprisingly, the final vote resulted in a unanimous discussion for a single barrel. "There was one that spoke to everyone, so that was the one we picked. It was really exciting." said Andrew Roberts. Once the barrel pick was complete, a final step allowed the group to sample the bourbon directly from the chosen barrel. Using a whisky thief tool, they each "stole" a final sample of the bourbon directly from the barrel. "Some of the best cask strength bourbon I've ever had." Andrew shared.

The team ended with lunch as they happily discussed the excitement of the morning and reflected on the great experience they had. The group returned

to Wisconsin thankful that they could experience a barrel pick and that it would work towards generating funds for Fisher House Wisconsin.

Next steps will be the bottling of the barrel and shipping up to Wisconsin, which is planned for March 2022. While the wait is challenging, the extra time in the barrel will make our selection more than eleven years old. Discount Liquor will then sell the specially marked single barrel Eagle Rare bottles, with a portion of the proceeds going to Fisher House Wisconsin. The proceeds will fund both on-going operational needs at the Milwaukee VA Fisher House, as well as for the construction of a Fisher House near the Madison VA.

Andrew Roberts closed our conversation with, "Were humbled by the support of both Buffalo Trace and Discount Liquor to support our Veterans and help raise awareness for the Fisher House Wisconsin mission. What a great way for the community to get involved." You'll have a chance to buy your very own bottle from the pick with more details coming soon.



THE COLONEL, from previous page

This last September, the Colonel's Cup golf outing resumed after taking 2020 off due to the pandemic. About 50 friends and family gathered for the event at Brighton Dale Links in Kenosha.

"We raised over \$1,000 for Fisher House. It was a great way to get together and remember my dad. The fundraising part is just a bonus," added Brigid.

THE DEDICATION OF A MILITARY WIFE AND MOTHER

Dorothy Bearss Legacy of Support Carries On Through Fisher House

dad was not there half the time," explained the Milwaukee resident.

It wasn't until he was going through his mom's things after her passing at the age of 91 in March that he discovered Dorothy's personal journey of serving her country.

"My mom spent a couple of years working for the CIA and met my dad when she was in

Washington D.C. They were married for 30 years. My mom has always been a warrior. She was very involved with veteran activities and supported the base. She just loved people and fought for everyone she knew," he added.

Dan followed in his dad's footsteps, graduating from Annapolis Naval Academy with service in the surface Navy for five years, then the Defense Intelligence Agency until 1995, after accumulating 17 years of active and reserve duty. He then spent 20 years teaching high school science at MPS.

"When my mom was reflecting on her life and concerned about who she should give money to after she passed, I told her about Fisher House," said Dan.

This last August, Dan presented a check for \$12,000 to Fisher House Wisconsin on behalf of his mom's estate.

"Having been a single military wife, my mom understood what it would

“My mom spent a couple of years working for the CIA and met my dad when she was in Washington D.C. They were married for 30 years.”

be like to be a family staying at Fisher House. She knew the organization's value and what it can do for a family," added Dan. "I feel that military people need to support each other. We've had common experiences and it's important to give when we have the opportunity."



By Rebecca Seymour

Since he was a little boy, Dan Bearss has known what it means to live a life of dedication to service of country. His father Ed Bearss served in the Navy at the end of WWII, and then in the Army in Korea, and in Vietnam as a Navy Seabee, retiring in 1970.

"My mom Dorothy met my dad when I was six years old. We lived on the military base at Midway Island in California. My dad was deployed to Vietnam three times, and it was just my mom and I. She was a military wife, and she knew what she needed to do to raise a son when my

Donor Contributions March 2020–November 2021

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DAVE AND JEAN KRISEL

Volunteer Spotlight

By Andrea Potthast



Volunteers are a very important part of Fisher House Wisconsin. We couldn't do what we do for Veterans' families without the heart and dedication of volunteers. Two such volunteers include Dave and Jean Kriesel. This dynamic duo has been

supporting Fisher House Wisconsin since the very beginning.

Both Jean and her husband Dave were raised to honor and respect the U.S. Military. Between each of their families, there's a history of military service in the Army, Air Force, and the Navy. Jean's uncles served in WWII. One of these uncles made the ultimate sacrifice and the family learned the price of freedom in a way that only Gold Star families can. Dave's father served during the Korean War and later served as a VFW Commander. The family legacy of military service continued with Dave's nephews, including one who served in Iraq. Jean's and Dave's mothers were both active at their local VFW auxiliary and his sister continues with the VFW auxiliary today.

Their family members may have originally inspired them to be advocates for Veterans, but as they saw their daughter's friends return from Iraq and Afghanistan, this further sparked their motivation to thank those who have served.

Jean was first introduced to Fisher House Wisconsin by John Broda who worked for the Armed Forces Financial Network (AFFN) – a division of FIS. He had a history of working with Ken Fisher and others at Fisher House Foundation and was talking about the capital funds needed to build a Fisher House on the Milwaukee VA grounds. Fast forward three years and the team had raised more than \$30,000 for Fisher House Wisconsin. Jean and Dave continued to make a difference for Fisher House Wisconsin by volunteering as greeters at the grand opening of the house in 2016. They have since participated in numerous other events to support Fisher House Wisconsin including the annual golf outing.

Jean and Dave are great examples of how Veteran advocacy can be done all while having a great time. Look for their smiling faces at future Fisher House Wisconsin events!

9th Annual Golf Outing Recap

By Angie Christianson

The 9th Annual Fisher House Wisconsin Golf Outing was held on Monday, August 30th. Not only did we have perfect weather the entire day, but the event was a major success! We welcomed a record number of golfers at 293 – enough to fill both golf courses at Geneva National. With sincere gratitude, we are also happy to announce that we raised the single largest amount of funds ever at this year's golf outing. These funds will support the operational needs of the Milwaukee VA Fisher House, as well as the future capital funds needed for the Madison VA Fisher House.

As golfers entered the parking lot, they were welcomed with the site of a large American flag that the Elkhorn and Lake Geneva Fire Departments proudly hung from their ladder truck. At registration, the golfers had an opportunity to buy a golf ball, write a unique identifying number on it, and then watch all the golf balls drop

from a towering height as the Elkhorn Fire Chief released them from the fire truck ladder. After the rain of golf balls, it was the owner of the ball that landed closest to the hole that was the winner. This time, that was Mr. Ed Garza, President/CEO at Center for Veterans Issues and Navy Veteran.

After the ball drop, we took some time to recognize Ben Breckheimer who is the first purple heart recipient to scale all 7 summits, the highest peaks of the 7 continents, in the world. Ben has been part of our golf outing for more years than I can recall and completed this monumental event right before the golf outing! We then turned the microphone over to Army Veteran Kit Amidzich for her

amazing acapella singing of the National Anthem.

Special thank you to our 31 sponsors! Fifteen of those sponsors donated golf for 54 Veterans, so that they could play for free. We also had more than 70 items and packages donated for the silent auction as well as many swag bag donations.

It would be remiss of me if I didn't thank our volunteers. More than 25 volunteers supported the golf outing this year. Several volunteers started with set-up the day before the outing which consisted of unloading a large truck with auction

Continued on next page



2021 GOLF OUTING, from previous page

items and then setting up the grand ballroom for the silent auction. Monday morning came early but our volunteers were ready to go! Registration, silent auction assistance, games on the holes, photographers, volunteer relief, check-out and clean-up were just some of the tasks our volunteers managed. We could not have had an event like this without the world's best volunteers!

On the heels of the most successful Fisher House Wisconsin golf outing ever, we are happy to announce the 10th Annual Fisher House Wisconsin Golf Outing will take place on Monday, August 29th, 2022 once again at Geneva National in Lake Geneva, WI. Registration will start at 8AM with golf at noon. Meals will be provided both before and after golf with awards presentations taking place during dinner. Please watch our website and Facebook for registration information. I encourage you to sign up early as we are already filling up!



We are always looking for more volunteers, silent auction donations, and swag bag items for the Annual Golf Outing. If you aren't able to golf, consider either contributing your time as a volunteer or a donation for the silent auction/swag bags. Please reach out to Angie at achristianson@fisherhousewi.org.

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

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