



Home Away from Home

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

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Message from the President



When I was voted in as President of Fisher House Wisconsin (FHW), I took time to reflect on everything we have done together. I spent time looking at what we did

in the past, where we are now, and where we are going together in the future. I looked at the strength of our Board of Directors, our generous donors, our faithful volunteers, our strong relationship with the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, our partnership with Fisher House Foundation, and our sense of pride as we move forward with plans to build a Fisher House at the Middleton/Madison Memorial Veterans Hospital.

It is truly remarkable to look at everything we have accomplished together towards our shared mission of providing a home away from home for the families of our country's military and veterans who are receiving treatment at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. In April 2022 we celebrated our six year anniversary at the Milwaukee VA Fisher House! We have welcomed over 3,500 families since we opened.

We have continued our partnership with Brewers Community Foundation as we await the details on the next 5K Famous Racing Sausages Run/Walk in July. We continue to grow our annual FHW Golf Outing. This year is our 10th annual outing on August 29th at Geneva National! We have continued to exceed the number of golfers and profits year over year. We also continue to grow Bill Michael's Annual Poker Run. On September 4th we celebrate Bill's 15th annual ride with the last 11 years dedicated to FHW. The stability of our core fundraisers never ceases to amaze me as we grow together.

As I go to speaking engagements to spread the word about FHW, someone inevitably asks me "Why? — Why did you choose to volunteer and invest your time with FHW?" Let me share my "why" with you. For starters, no, I am not a Veteran. My Grandpa was in the Army and my Dad was in the Air Force but no, I did not serve.

Next – I was invited by a past President of FHW to volunteer at a golf outing. Those who know me are well aware that I don't know anything about golf but I CAN drive a golf cart and snap pictures with my phone. I met some amazingly courageous men and women at the golf outing. I heard stories that brought tears to my eyes, and I saw that pain that still exists today for services that were provided to our country decades ago. The first thing I thought was "How can I help?"

I joined the Fund Development & Marketing (FD&M) Committee. Shortly after that, I became a co-chair of the committee. We were planning fundraisers, speaking engagements, check acceptances, donor management, and the list goes on. While co-chairing FD&M, I was asked if I would consider being a Director on the Board. I was ecstatic and instantly said YES!!! From there I became VP, and now President.

As my journey continues with FHW, I continue to be inspired by the selfless contributions made by each of YOU. YOU are the reason I continue to do what I do.

I wish all of you a safe and healthy summer and I look forward to seeing you at our events and outings this year!

—Angie Christianson, President



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Marie Hudson

Look no further than the Milwaukee VA Fisher House kitchen to find house volunteer, Marie Hudson. The kitchen is the heart of the home is a common saying and it couldn't be truer than anywhere but at the Fisher House. Guests at the Fisher House often gather in the kitchen. Whether it is for a quick coffee before heading-up to the hospital to be with their loved one or to fill their bellies after an emotionally exhausting day of medical-speak and trepidation, all guests end-up in the kitchen. There they will find a smiling Marie.

Known for offering a much-needed levity to the environment for guests and staff, her cheerfulness and good humor has brought much happiness to the Fisher House. "She is as dedicated as they come, and she makes Monday mornings fun and exciting with her humor and stories. Although she is known for saying "it's too much", I can say that at Fisher House we can definitely never have "too much" of Marie."

Marie started supporting Fisher House when it was just an idea. She volunteered at many fundraising events at Miller Park, Wisconsin State Fair, and many other festivals. She also worked to raise awareness of Fisher House which included

marching in the Milwaukee Veterans Day Parade and handing out pamphlets. She thought it was very important to get the message out, so people were made aware of the needs of Veterans' families. "Not very many people had the knowledge of what it was," Marie commented about Fisher House. Thanks to her efforts, this has certainly changed.

Marie has always been motivated to help Veterans. As the daughter of a WWII veteran, she saw her father volunteer and participant in various Veteran organizations. Her father's service has

moved Marie to serve in her own way. Perhaps even more so that her father was in the Battle of the Bulge, a crucial counterattack that was successful primarily due to the grit and courage of brave American soldiers, like her father, each doing their part to make a difference. Marie's father was awarded two Purple Hearts and more than seventy years later, Marie continues this ethos - to make a difference.

Shortly after Fisher House became a reality and opened its doors in April 2016, Marie became a house volunteer. She was still juggling her day job, so she focused on evening volunteer opportunities like supporting the Meal Train volunteers. The Meal Train provides an opportunity for volunteers to bring meals for guests at the house. "What a wonderful program and our guest sure did appreciate a meal after spending the day at the hospital." Marie added.

As she closed out her forty-eight-year career at Marcus Corporation, the opportunity for Marie to volunteer weekly at Fisher House presented itself. She now maintains the kitchen – the heart of the home – at the Fisher House. "I take a lot of pride in keeping it clean and sanitary."

Seeing the impact on families continues to motivate Marie. "I always feel like I was put there to help out for a reason. It makes me feel good when I see guests with a smile on their face."





NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES, MADISON COUNCIL

Get To Know the Navy League Council

Founded in 1902, the Navy League of the United States is dedicated to informing and educating the American public and members of Congress on the importance of maintaining strong U. S. Sea Services—the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine.

The Madison, WI, Council is one of 200 Navy League Councils located throughout the U.S., in Europe, and the Far East, that supports active-duty military personnel, boosting morale and extending its appreciation through “adoption” of ships, installations, and units; commissioning ceremonies; and award programs. Membership is open to civilians and veterans; however, no prior military experience is required.

The Madison Council had a busy 2021 working with area students to develop skills in engineering and design as well as supporting youth interested in a possible career in the U.S. Navy or U.S. Coast Guard. They participated in the “Raise the Flag” event in Stoughton and placed flags in the front yards of businesses and residents on Memorial Day and Independence Day. They also sponsor the Superior Academic & Leadership Award which is presented to the top Surface Warfare selected midshipman at UW-NROTC as well as other scholarships. In addition, they raised \$1,000 for Fisher House Wisconsin during their annual Army-Navy Game Social and Fundraiser. Monies are designated for the Fisher House being planned for Madison. They hosted a full house at the American Legion in Stoughton and the crowd



Ulis Dean Hekel

U.S. Navy

Jan 8, 1958–Sept 28, 1991

Chaplain

VA Hospital, Madison, WI

was very supportive of Fisher House Wisconsin’s work and plans to build a facility in Madison.

One of the individual supporters of the Madison Council and Fisher House is Mr. Dean Hekel.

Dean Hekel: 35 years in the Navy

Dean enlisted in the Navy and after five years got his commission and served as a submarine officer. He had earned his degree in electrical engineering and then received a Master’s in Nuclear Engineering. He spent 12 years at

sea at command of a submarine and then worked in command-and-control communication working with NATO in the Atlantic and Pacific. Near the end of his naval career Dean was the commanding officer at the Naval ROTC University of Wisconsin.

After his retirement from the Navy, he studied pastoral counseling and became an Episcopalian priest and helped build a church in Sun Prairie. Dean further amplified his life of service when we served at a Chaplain at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans’ Hospital. He often visited with patients and families for 12 hours a day as he always wanted to make sure he got to everyone. “Helping them deal with – well, a million stories,” said Dean as he remembered his time at the VA.

Dean felt the need to help which is why he did it for so long. Today at 84 years old, Dean reflected on the marriages and funerals he conducted. “I did whatever they needed”. He was the only Chaplain who was a Veteran. “Vets like to talk to Vets,” said Dean. Dean felt being a Veteran helped many feel that he would understand and so they opened-up to him.

Dean believed in the Fisher House Program getting started. “We have people from all over the state, where do they stay?” Dean, who gets his care at the VA, thinks the VA does a great job. Thank you to Dean and all those at the Madison Council for their support of Fisher House Wisconsin.



**In honor of Memorial Day,
consider a donation to
Fisher House Wisconsin**

fisherhousewi.org/donate-online/



By Jennifer Kiefer

As we turn another year older and enter our sixth year of being open, we are excited to start seeing signs of spring pop up around the house. The snow and ice on the patio have melted and we have a date set for our annual spring clean-up event provided by Oshkosh Defense. This will be the fifth year that Oshkosh Defense has come out to the Fisher House for a day of planting flowers, laying mulch, setting up our patio furniture and cleaning out the gardens for us. We have developed a great partnership with Oshkosh Defense over the years and look

HOUSE UPDATE

Celebrating Our Sixth Year Anniversary

forward to their outdoor help in both the spring and fall.

As visitation is opening and more procedures are being scheduled at the medical center, we are seeing an increase in the families referred to the Fisher House. It is always nice to see familiar faces return as well as getting to meet new families and show them what Fisher House offers when they lodge with us. Having more families in the Fisher House is always a bittersweet feeling for our staff. As much as we love to see families benefit from the warmth and comforts of this environment, ultimately, we know they are worrying about a health-related concern of a loved one. Our dedicated staff and volunteers at Fisher House are here to make sure your needs are met, and any added stress is eased with a good night sleep and a warm meal. Speaking of meals, we are happy to report

that we have reopened our Meal Train site to allow for community groups to come in and prepare a meal for our Fisher House families. Please contact us if you have a small group interested in making a meal at the Fisher House or follow this link to schedule a date: www.mealtrain.com/39yovl

Lastly, 2022 has started off as a difficult year for the families of some of our Fisher House volunteers. Our team of volunteers have formed close bonds and friendships while serving in their roles and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge how grateful we are for the work they do at the Fisher House and to let them know that our thoughts are with each of them as they face loss and illness of family members.

Thank you all for your continued support of the Fisher House at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

Donor Contributions NOVEMBER 15, 2021-APRIL 22, 2022

IN HONOR OF

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fisherhousewi.org/donate-online/

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Mail a check payable to
Fisher House Wisconsin
P.O. Box 13768
Milwaukee, WI 53213-0768

For Those Who Make It Back

By Andrea Potthast



The Hidalgo Family including spouses and grandkids are pictured at Carmen's wedding in 2021. Jared was in military training and could not attend.

“ This story is framed by three ethos: service to family, service to country, and honor and integrity as a servant leader. ”

Last year, I received an email from the then Fisher House Wisconsin President, Dirk Debbink. It was regarding a delightful dinner he had with the Hidalgos. I knew the Hidalgos as a military family who supported Veteran causes. I learned from the email that at the dinner, Jorge Hidalgo and his wife, Andrea, presented Fisher House Wisconsin with a very large donation. Jorge had served on the Fisher House Wisconsin board from 2014–2019, which overlapped my time on the board by only a year, so I knew him a little. I was curious to learn more and to my surprise and delight, he agreed to an interview.

Throughout our interview I found myself wishing I could be as skilled as he was at using as few words as possible to get points across as eloquently, yet decisively, as he did. I will attempt to live-up to this standard as I share the Hidalgo family story. This story is framed by three ethos: service to family, service to country, and honor and integrity as a servant leader.

Jorge [xorxe] Hidalgo, although he goes by 'George' was born in the Dominican Republic in 1958. Jorge remembers running around as a young barefoot child, but rather than focusing on the circumstances he was born into – he focused on the opportunities he had in his life in the United States. Jorge has lived around the world, and this has made him even more thankful for the



The Hidalgo family: from left Miles, Jared, Jorge, Andrea and Carmen.

continued on page 7

HIDALGO, continued

opportunities that abound in the US. Jorge certainly made the most of those opportunities and graduated from West Point in '81. He served 8 years active duty as an US Army infantry officer and then 4 years in reserve duty. "Without education, I wouldn't be where I am today," said Jorge. Education opened doors and helped him overcome many obstacles in life.

Jorge and Andrea have four children: Jared, Miles, Daren, and Carmen. All three of their boys decided to serve their country in the military. Daren and Miles both went into the Army like their father while Jared opted for the Marines. "It makes Army/Navy Games a lot of fun," said Jorge. The family celebrated many commissioning ceremonies, military accolades, and accomplishments. They also faced many deployments. Jorge recalled helping his youngest son, Daren, pack-up at Fort Benning prior to his deployment to Afghanistan. During the long ride home, they had a difficult conversation. Jorge asked a question that would speak to a truth that every military family must face. Jorge asked his son, "If, God forbid, something was to happen to you, what would you like us to do?" Daren shared two wishes with his dad that day. Never did they think they would have to carry out those wishes. Tragically, on February 20, 2011, just shy of his 25th birthday, 1LT Daren Hidalgo was killed in action while serving in Operation Enduring Freedom in Kandahar Province.

Determined to fulfill Daren's wishes, Jorge and Andrea reflected on what their son had said. The first of Daren's wishes was to help kids who don't have the financial means to go to college. Daren wished to have a scholarship created at his high school that would help kids less fortunate

than him. "I was impressed that he wanted something like this for his legacy," said Jorge. To honor Daren's legacy, Jorge and Andrea created The Daren M. Hidalgo Scholarship which seeks to assist Dallastown High School seniors with post-secondary education. To date, twelve \$5,000 scholarships have been distributed and another two will be presented this year.

Daren's second wish was for them to do whatever they could do for those who do make it back. This wish was no surprise to those who knew Daren. He was known as a dedicated platoon leader who made sure his soldiers were taken care of. If he wouldn't be there to do it, he wanted to make sure someone else was. Jorge and Andrea fill that role today with their work for several Veteran organizations including Homes for our Troops, DAV, and Fisher House.

Jorge looks back on his time on the Fisher House board with pride. "There were a lot of long nights, presentations, and meetings." Jorge worked with leaders like Dan Buttery, Curtiss Peck, Dick Leinenkugel, and many others who worked to raise the initial funds needed to build the house in Milwaukee. He reflected on the pride he and others felt the day of the house opening. "It was our house. All those who had donated time and money and all those who would stay there – it was theirs." With excitement, Jorge looks forward to working with Veteran supporters as we wait to hear more on the location of the next Fisher House near the Middleton VA. "A house is much needed in Madison. It will help a lot of people," said Jorge.

Jorge's advice for people looking to get involved is to not be afraid to ask. "If you



1LT Daren M Hidalgo, 24, was Killed in Action February 20, 2011 while serving his country in Afghanistan.

can't give money, give your time," said Jorge. Jorge's servant leader mindset has guided him through his career including as a Senior Executive at Harley Davidson and now as the owner of Wilde East Towne Honda automotive dealership in Madison, WI. "Life isn't about money. Core values is how I run my business. Integrity matters." One can't help but to get an overwhelming sense of community when talking to Jorge. He embraces military, veterans, customers, and his community as family.

Losing Daren has forever shaped Jorge and his family. Yet they are motivated to carry-on Daren's legacy. "There's a disconnect in society between those who serve and the 99% who don't," Jorge shared. He encourages all those who can, to help those who have served and find ways to give back.

For more information on Darren Hidalgo <https://www.rememberdaren.com/>

Jay, a Wisconsin native, grew-up in Green Bay and has lived in both Madison and Milwaukee. During his 40+ year career in the power and energy industry, he has valued working alongside many U.S. Military Service Veterans. Most commonly this includes Navy Veterans as they have occupations related to ship propulsion. Once these servicemembers leave active duty, they tend to work in power plants for utilities, industrial, healthcare and even college campuses; all places Jay's career has taken him. Jay respects these

**“Veterans should
never be out of sight,
out of mind.”**

Jay has a proud history of military service in his family. His father and two uncles served in WWII. On Jay's mother's side he had three uncles and one aunt who also served. In addition, Jay's father-in-law served. Through all these connections,

Jay feels that this can happen by supporting Veterans directly or supporting their families through organizations like Fisher House Wisconsin. Jay went on to share that he feels that everything we see and have, is because we can enjoy our freedoms won by our U.S. Military Servicemembers. Their sacrifices are a debt we can never repay, but we can contribute our time and treasures to Veteran-based charities. "Veterans should never be out of sight, out of mind." Jay went on to add that his choice of Fisher House was a no brainer. "Lets all give back."

Thanks to Jay and the Energy and Industrial division at Boldt for their support.





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FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

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An aerial photograph showing a large group of motorcycles, primarily Harley-Davidsons, parked in a long line on a paved road. The motorcycles are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and scale. The surrounding area includes green grass and some trees.

SAVE THE DATE!

**The Big Unit's
Fisher House
Motorcycle
Poker Run**

September 4th, 2022

facebook.com/BigUnitPokerRun

The Fisher House Wisconsin logo is positioned in the top right corner of the poster. It is a circular emblem with a blue outer ring containing the text "FISHER HOUSE" and "WISCONSIN" separated by stars. The center features a white outline of Wisconsin with a blue house and a red heart inside.