



Home Away from Home

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

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Message from the President



Earlier in the year, I made myself a note to step back around the Holidays and look at everything Fisher House Wisconsin (FHW) has accomplished. I think about this often, but to have a calendar pop-up remind me to step back seemed more impactful for some reason.

Holidays seem to be about a lot of traditions, whether it's playing the same games, singing the same songs, enjoying the same meals, or always having a Holiday celebration with family. A tradition is something steady and consistent that you can rely on year after year.

In reflecting back on 2023, our FHW Board of Directors is anything BUT traditional and consistent. We are constantly fluid, ever evolving, growing, building, and becoming stronger. Here are some examples of the changes we went through in 2023! A few months back we welcomed **Rudy Johnson** to our Board as a new Director. You will hear more about him later in this newsletter. He is a veteran and is based in the Madison area.

Our VP, **Chuck Steinmetz**, GM for Fox 6 Milwaukee, retired from Fox 6 this summer and will be stepping back from being our VP and will move to a Director role. Chuck has been a steady on our Board and I am thrilled that he will still be staying with us. Chuck has been a go to for me for the last couple of years. His perspective and unique insight has been invaluable.

Replacing Chuck as our new VP effective January 1, 2024 is **Timothy La Sage**. Tim is currently a Director on our Board and serves as the Military Affairs Manager at WPS. Tim is a Marine Corps veteran and a two-time purple heart recipient. He has a powerful story on what Fisher House means to him. Being a single Dad at that time raising 3 girls while serving two tours of duty then being

injured and homeless, is just the start of Tim's story. I am excited to work with Tim in his new role as VP!

Carmen Anderson has been on our board since 2017. The majority of her time served has been as our Secretary. Carmen's term is up at the end of this year. Carmen is also an Attorney and has been someone our Board has turned to many times for input and guidance. We will certainly miss Carmen but are confident we will stay in touch!

Replacing Carmen as our new Secretary effective January 1 is **Dirk Stallmann**. Dirk is currently a Director and is the President of Verlo Mattress. He has served on our Board for several years and brings with him a calming aura and can-do attitude. I am looking forward to working with Dirk as he takes on a new role!

Replacing Dirk will be **Theo Williams**. Theo is an Army veteran and works as a Director of Logistics for the Industries for the Blind. Theo is very active in the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association Chapter 45-6. We look forward to working with Theo!

We are also welcoming **Jon Ward** to the Board. Jon is a retired Diplomat, has an extensive Military background, and is an Army veteran. Jon is in the Milwaukee area. His term starts January 1.

We also added two Board positions in Dane County in anticipation of kicking off our Capital campaign in 2024/2025 for the Madison VA Fisher House. Rudy, who I mentioned earlier, is one of our additions as well as **Brent Eisberner**. Brent is a partner of Levine Eisberner, LLC in Madison and is also a Marine Corps veteran. He is eager to use his fundraising and event planning skills for our Board starting January 1.

As the year begins in 2024, we will have 15 Board Members and seven of them are veterans. This

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, *continued*

is the highest number of veterans we have ever had on our Board since its inception in 2011. Our Board strongly feels that the more veterans we have, the more real-life perspectives we get and the more perspectives we get, the better we can pivot together to address upcoming needs. The depth and diversity of our Board is something we unanimously agreed on as something we needed to do with Madison around the corner.

In November, we held two Town Halls—one in Madison at the Veterans Museum and one in Milwaukee at the War Memorial Center. Both were amazing venues! In total, we almost TRIPLED our attendance from our one Town Hall last year. It was so nice to meet sponsors and donors in person, spend time with our volunteers, and watch networking occur. The best part of the Town Hall was being able to share some statistics and our go-forward strategy and vision. This wasn't a fundraiser but rather a thank-you to the people that have made FHW as successful as we are.

Speaking of thanks, I want to say thank you to YOU. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to FHW. Thank you for your donations and contributions, your volunteer hours, spreading the word about FHW, and your steadfast commitment to our mission. On Thanksgiving morning, I received a text message from one of our donors wishing me a Happy Thanksgiving. I was caught off guard and had never received a text from a donor like that before. It was a simple text, "Happy Thanksgiving," which led to a back-and-forth text conversation of what each of our plans were. He shared how many kids he had, how many people he and his wife were cooking for, then shared a picture of his beautiful granddaughter. This brief conversation left me with tears in my eyes that someone thinks as highly of FHW as I do AND thought of us on Thanksgiving morning so took the time to send a text message. This kind gesture left me with an immense abundance of gratitude that is hard to put into words.

We have a lot of momentum and exciting things that we will be announcing in 2024 so please stay tuned by watching our website and social media venues. Please know how much we appreciate you. Enjoy your holiday season with family and friends and take a moment to step back and be thankful.

—Angie Christianson, President

RUDY JACKSON, DNP, MHA, RN, CENP



Meet Our NEWEST BOARD MEMBER

Rudy Jackson currently serves as the Senior Vice President and Chief Nurse Executive for UW Health. The University of Wisconsin Health System is a 5-billion-dollar health system, serving 1 million unique patients in seven hospitals and 90 ambulatory clinics throughout the Madison and Northern Illinois region.

Rudy earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from the University of The Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas, a Master of Healthcare Administration from Webster University in St. Louis,

Missouri, and a Doctorate of Nursing Practice from Yale, New Haven, Connecticut.

Prior to civilian work, Rudy served in the US Army for 20+ years in both enlisted and commissioned officer roles. Prior to his deployment as a Civil Affairs Officer supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, he served as a member of the US Army Nurse Corp. In both roles, Rudy was committed to the service of others. The Fisher House supports that continued mission and there is no greater honor than serving those that have served.



From left to right: Brent Eisberner (new Board member), Amber & John Atlee, owners of Water Doctors and sponsors of the Madison Town Hall, Michelle Friedman, Director. These were just a small handful of attendees at our Madison Town Hall.

Thank you to DeWitt for being the sponsor of our Milwaukee Town Hall.





REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE OF MARINE RYAN JERABEK:

A Hero's Journey

A Poem by Ryan Jerabek

*Misty hills of a mysterious land,
Crafted by a majestic hand.
Something beautiful in the air,
All I can do is stop and stare.*

*The dampness of the ground,
The dew is abound.
The shape of the trees,
Will bring me to my knees.*

*Forbidden melodies of the song,
From the place in which I long.
Many of the things in which I see,
Doesn't compare to what's inside of me.*

*My heritage holds a place in my heart,
I knew I loved Ireland right from the start.
I will get there some day,
I will any which way.*

*The future unclear,
This place I hold dear.
For I haven't been there,
This world is unfair.*

*The land of Ireland,
The place I will stand.
Long ago untouched by Rome.
I now know this is my home.*



Ryan wrote this poem before he traveled to Ireland with his brother Aaron, January 5, 2001.

By Michelle M. Friedman

In 2004, in the quiet town of Hobart, Wisconsin, the Jerabek family faced the heart-wrenching reality of losing their son, Marine Private First Class Ryan Jerabek, who had dreams of becoming a history teacher. Though destined for college, his sense of duty led him to enlist in the Marine Corps, a decision that would ultimately alter the course of his life.

In March, the 18-year-old Jerabek embarked on a mission to Iraq—Operation Iraqi Freedom. Tragically, on April 6, 2004, his parents—Ken and Rita Jerabek, as well as his brothers, Nick and Aaron Jerabek, received the devastating news of their son's sacrifice.

Ryan, a graduate of Pulaski High School, lost his life in a firefight in Ramadi, Iraq, a region where more than 15 Marines had recently perished. Serving with the 2d Battalion 4th Marines, he became the youngest Wisconsin soldier to lose his life since the Iraq War began and the first casualty from Brown County.

Ryan's journey began with his enlistment in July 2003, followed by basic training in October. He briefly returned home on leave, displaying unwavering commitment. After Advanced Infantry Training at Camp Pendleton, he returned home before deploying to Kuwait for three weeks and subsequently to Iraq for four weeks.

Ryan had envisioned a future beyond the military—a four-year commitment followed by pursuing a history teaching career at

Stevens Point, with the goal of returning to teach at Pulaski.

Throughout his military service, Ryan remained in contact with loved ones. His last conversation with his family was on a Sunday, just days before the tragic incident. He spoke of his experiences, his spirits high, and even requested more candy bars to share with children in Iraq.

He had a passion for reading and history, harboring aspirations of becoming a history teacher in the future. Among his dreams was the desire to delve into the birthplace of independence and liberty in our nation. In November 2001, Ryan, accompanied by his mother, walked the historic Freedom Trail in Boston, a journey that left an indelible mark on him.

Proud of his heritage, Ryan felt a deep connection to his Irish roots. In another adventure in November 2001, he explored the rich landscapes of Ireland alongside his brother, Aaron, immersing himself in the history encapsulated in the castles, fields, and meadows.

While computers consumed much of Ryan's time prior to joining the military, engaging in online gaming with individuals across the nation, his most cherished moments were spent with his brothers, Nick and Aaron, both of whom he held dear. Despite the distance, their bond remained unbreakable. Ryan's love for his country was unwavering, driving him to strive for excellence in his

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HERO'S JOURNEY, *continued*

role as a Marine. He aimed to make a meaningful difference in the world, showcasing a maturity that surpassed his years.

His family has done a lot over the years to honor Ryan, ranging from raising more than \$100,000 through an annual run they hosted for seven years, to their current efforts to raise funds in Ryan's honor to benefit FHW through their Annual Meat Night Fundraiser.

The Meat Night Fundraiser includes more than 50 men that are friends, co-workers and others who are dedicated to raising funds for FHW in honor of Ryan. It consists of more grilled and smoked meat than many can imagine. There are no plates, just carving knives and paper towels, coupled with ice-cold beer, good bourbon, cigars, and men that want to give back. Over the past six years, Meat Night has raised tens of thousands of dollars for FHW.

The Jerabeks have committed to raise \$100,000 over the next several years to benefit FHW, and its future home in Madison. Ryan will have permanent recognition at the future Madison VA Fisher House once it is built. FHW will begin a capital campaign to raise funds for the new home in 2024. The target date to break ground for the new home is 2025 and is dependent upon the VA's ability to locate land near the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital and Clinics.



Check out the fun everyone had at the 11th Annual FHW Golf Outing this summer! The weather was perfect. Thank you to everyone that attended and to our volunteers!



Meat Fest 2023



Providing Comfort and Support



A Reminder About the Mission of Fisher House Wisconsin

By Michelle M. Friedman

Fisher House Wisconsin (FHW) stands as a beacon of hope and support for veterans and military families facing challenging times. Founded on the principles of compassion and community, this organization plays a crucial role in the well-being of those connected to our nation's heroes.

FHW is part of the Fisher House Foundation, a non-profit organization established to provide free lodging for military families while their loved ones receive medical treatment.

At the heart of FHW's mission is the provision of helping the Milwaukee VA Fisher House provide comfortable accommodations for families facing medical crises. The facility offers a "home away from home," ensuring that families can stay close to their veteran or military member receiving care at the nearby Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center. FHW is also working on an additional Fisher House, which will be in Madison, Wisconsin near the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital and Clinics.

The house provides a warm and inviting environment, equipped with all the necessities to make families feel at ease during their stay. From fully furnished bedrooms to communal living spaces, the Milwaukee VA Fisher House strives to create a supportive atmosphere where families can find solace and connect with others experiencing similar challenges.

The Milwaukee VA Fisher House ensures that families remain within a short distance of their loved ones undergoing medical treatment. This proximity eliminates the financial and logistical challenges associated with finding suitable lodging during stressful times, allowing families to focus on what matters most – supporting their veteran or military member on the road to recovery.

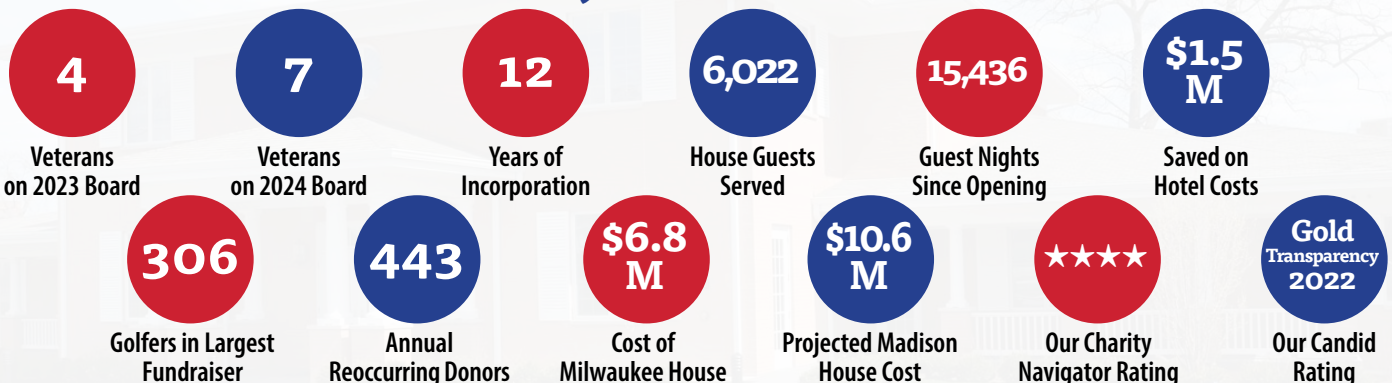
FHW relies heavily on the generosity of the community in its efforts to continue to support the Milwaukee VA Fisher House. Local businesses, organizations, and individuals contribute through donations and volunteer efforts, making it possible for the house to continue its vital mission. The collaborative spirit of the community underscores the importance of supporting military families and recognizing their sacrifices.

Since its establishment in 2016, the Milwaukee VA Fisher House has provided comfort and support to more than 6,000 veteran and military families. The impact of the organization extends beyond the walls of the house, fostering a sense of community and understanding among those who have shared similar experiences.

For those inspired by FHW's mission, there are various ways to contribute. Whether through monetary donations, volunteering time, or spreading awareness, every effort plays a crucial role in supporting military families during challenging times.

FHW stands as a testament to the power of compassion and community. By helping the Milwaukee VA Fisher House in providing a home away from home, this organization ensures that veterans and military families can focus on their loved ones' recovery without the added stress of finding suitable accommodations. As we salute the dedication of our armed forces, we also recognize and support the invaluable work of FHW and the staff at the Milwaukee VA Fisher House in serving those who sacrifice for our freedom.

Fisher House Wisconsin by the Numbers





Fisher House Wisconsin, Inc.
P.O. Box 13768
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TWO WAYS TO GIVE

ONLINE OR MAIL

During the holiday season, giving is often a theme. If you believe in the mission of FHW and would like to donate this season, we have included a donation envelope with this newsletter. You can also donate online via credit or debit card from our website www.fisherhousewi.org/donate.

Donations are critical to our mission to sustain a home away from home for the families and loved ones of veterans and military service members. We actively seek monetary contributions from individuals, organizations, and businesses to help us sustain FHW. Even the smallest gift makes a difference this holiday season.

IN HONOR OF

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Anne and Tony Fisher
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James Johnson
Kyle Kactro, IAD Afghanistan
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Peyton and Sawyer Long
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