



# Home Away from Home

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

## Board of Directors

### OFFICERS

**Angie Christianson, President**  
Sr. Manager, Strategic Partner  
Operations, Stanley Black & Decker

**Chuck Steinmetz,**  
**Vice President,** General Manager,  
WITI Fox 6 (Retired)

**Chad O'Brien, Treasurer**  
Partner, Baker Tilly

**Carmen Anderson, Secretary**  
Senior Counsel, Husch Blackwell

### DIRECTORS

**Michelle Friedman,** Sergeant,  
U.S. Army Veteran, Director of  
Marketing, DeWitt LLP

**Matt Griffin,** U.S. Navy Veteran,  
Information Technology (IT)  
Director at Johnson Controls

**Rudy Jackson,** Captain, U.S.  
Army Veteran, SVP/Chief Nurse  
Executive, UW Health

**Patti Kneiser,**  
Vice President of Employer  
Services, Froedtert

**Tim La Sage,** 1st Sergeant, U.S.  
Marine Corps Veteran, Military  
and Veteran Inclusion Lead, WPS  
Health Solutions

**Bill Michaels,** The Bill Michaels  
Show, 96.7FM 1670AM The Zone

**Terri Leigh Rhody,**  
Vice President of Marketing,  
Sware, Inc.

**Wade Roberts,** Vice President  
of Pieper Electric and Ideal  
Mechanical Inc.

**Dirk Stallman,** President, Verlo

## Message from the President



Earlier this year, I made myself a note to step back around the holidays and reflect upon everything Fisher House Wisconsin has accomplished throughout the past year. While I think about this often, having

a calendar reminder pop up seems more impactful in focusing my thoughts for some reason.

Holidays center around 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 steady and consistent, something you can rely on year after year.

In reflecting back on 2023, while our Fisher House Wisconsin Board of Directors can be relied upon year after year, our Board also is consistently fluid, ever evolving, growing, building, and becoming stronger.

Our VP, **Chuck Steinmetz** retired from his role as GM for Fox 6 this summer, and he has decided to move back into a Director role. Chuck has been a steady force on our Board, and I am thrilled 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 have been invaluable.

Replacing Chuck as our new VP to start the new year is **Timothy La Sage**. Currently a Director, Tim serves as the Military Affairs Manager at WPS. A Marine Veteran, Tim is a two-time purple heart recipient with a powerful story on what Fisher House means to him. A single dad who raised three girls while serving two tours of duty and then was injured and homeless is only the start of Tim's story. I am excited to work with Tim in his new role as our VP.

Rounding out our executive changes, **Carmen Anderson** has been on the Board since 2017. Most

of those years, she served 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 we will stay in touch.

Replacing Carmen as our new Secretary is **Dirk Stallmann**. Currently a Director, Dirk is the President of Verlo Mattress. Dirk has served on our Board for several years and brings a calming aura and can-do attitude. I am looking forward to working with Dirk in his new role.

With these changes across our executive team, we have several new Directors joining the FHW Board:

- **Theo Williams** is an Army Veteran and works as a Director of Logistics at Industries for the Blind. He is also very active in the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association Chapter 45-6.

- **Jon Ward**, who is a retired Diplomat, has an extensive military background. He is an Army Veteran and located in the Milwaukee area. Jon will begin at the start of 2024.

In addition, we've added two Directors to bolster our Board composition as we prepare for our capital campaign for the upcoming Madison VA Fisher House:

- A couple of months ago, we welcomed **Rudy Johnson**, who is based in the Madison area, to our Board as a new Director. An Army Veteran, Rudy serves as SVP and Chief Nurse Executive at UW Health. (You can read more about Rudy in this newsletter.)

- **Brent Eisberner** will join our Board to start off 2024. Brent, who lives in Sun Prairie, is a partner at Levine Eisberner, LLC in Madison and a Marine Veteran. He is eager to leverage his fundraising and event planning skills for our Board.

As of January 1st, we will have 15 Board Members – seven of them Veterans. This is the most Veterans

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, *continued*

representation we have 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. The more perspectives we get, the better we can pivot together to address evolving needs. The depth and diversity of our Board is something we unanimously agreed upon with the Madison House 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 venues were amazing. In total, we nearly **TRIPLED** our attendance compared to our one Town Hall last year. It was so nice to meet sponsors and donors in person, spend time with our volunteers, and watch relationships develop during the networking time. 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 everyone involved with FHW. Thank you to all the people who have helped FHW succeed in its mission.

Speaking of thanks, I want to say "thank you" to all of 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 steadfastness to our mission.

On Thanksgiving morning, I received a text message from one of our donors wishing me "Happy Thanksgiving." I was caught off-guard, as I had never received a text from a donor like in the past. It was a simple text message, which led to a back-and-forth text conversation around our plans. He shared how many kids he had, how many people he and his wife were cooking for, and 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 enough of us on Thanksgiving morning to take the time to send a message. This kind gesture left me with an immense abundance of thanks—which 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 channels. 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

4

Veterans  
on 2023 Board

7

Veterans  
on 2024 Board

12

Years of  
Incorporation

6,022

House Guests  
Served

15,436

Guest Nights  
Since Opening

\$1.5  
M

Saved on  
Hotel Costs

306

Golfers in Largest  
Fundraiser

443

Annual  
Reoccurring Donors

\$6.8  
M

Cost of  
Milwaukee House

\$10.6  
M

Projected Madison  
House Cost

★★★★

Our Charity  
Navigator Rating

Gold  
Transparency  
2022

Our Candid  
Rating



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Milwaukee, WI 53213-0768

FISHER HOUSE WISCONSIN NEWS

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## Donation Tributes JUNE 2, 2023 – NOVEMBER 30, 2023

### IN HONOR OF

John F. Bird  
Barbara M. Ewen  
Anne and Tony Fisher  
Richard Friedrich  
David Hoover  
James Johnson  
Kyle Kactro, IAD Afghanistan  
Norman Lassa  
Peyton and Sawyer Long  
Albert A. Nienas  
Tom Popola  
Andrea Pothast  
Dan Sorce  
Ed Stephani  
Gordon Wayne Stofler  
Lyle Tennis  
Jimmy Yeager

### IN MEMORY OF

Michael Adamski  
Charlie Adkinson  
Dorian S. Ahrens  
Jerome Banaszynski  
Dennis W. Beaudry  
Tom Burlowski  
Ronald Blust

Norbert Boinski  
Paul Buege, SMS  
Lorena Burmesch  
Patrick J. Busche  
Bret Carroll  
Elvira Chicante  
James Davel  
James "Jim" Dowling  
Harold Erickson  
Marjorie Farrell  
Scott Greve  
Nadine Gollither  
Bruce Graham  
Rick Gutwald  
Robert T. Hansen  
Jeffrey Hartzheim  
Jean Heling  
Gary Heyel  
John Hollingsworth  
Jacob J. Huber, Jr  
Evan Jeide  
Ryan Jerabek, USMC  
Jacob H. Kah  
Gloria Kelroy  
Joseph Kotarak  
Rita Kryst  
Richard A. Larsen, USAF  
Linda Martinovich Zdanowski

Dorothy A. Martin  
Shirley Masters  
Col. William D. McKeown  
Charles F. Meyer Jr.  
Jerome Nichols  
Diane Nunemaker  
Daniel Palkowski  
David J. Pfaff  
John F. Pikna  
Tom Popola  
Grant Rediske  
Dennis K. Reischl  
Larry Ritchey  
Dan Schmidt  
Kyle K. Schultz  
Tom Seitz  
Douglas Sell  
Jay Slind  
Larry Steinkraus  
Robert E. Stolpe  
Donald Walloch  
Allen P. Wayda  
Katherine Wartick  
Gail Williams Bertolino  
Ralph Wnuk  
Paul Woida  
Robert Zwitter

### 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](http://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.

## TWO WAYS TO GIVE

