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# Family



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*The Magazine For Military Families*



## Home Away from Home

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**PAGE 14**



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**Editor's Note:** In the May issue of *Family*, we regrettably and incorrectly published photographs from the Fisher House Foundation with an article about Operation Homefront, which we featured in the April issue. Fisher House Foundation provides an invaluable service to military families, and we wanted to be sure to share the incredible work that these folks do. So this month, we are highlighting the work of Fisher House Foundation in our cover story with the corresponding photographs. We hope you enjoy!

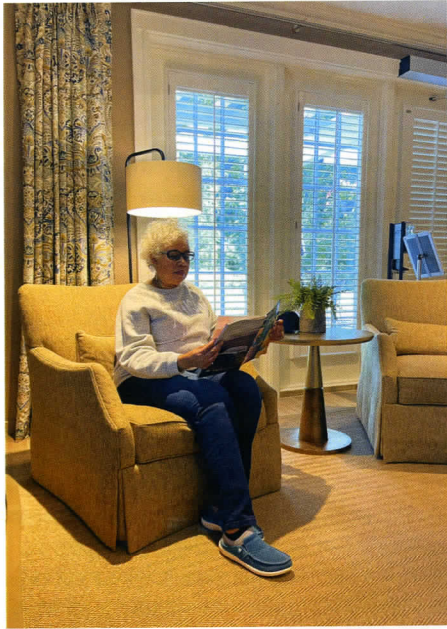
**M**ilitary families learn to live with a host of challenges and burdens, but one of the worst is learning that a beloved service member is wounded, injured, or ill. A unique organization, the Fisher House Foundation, is helping to ease these hardships by providing an international network of 94 "comfort homes," where families of wounded, injured, or ill service members and veterans can stay at no cost for as long as the hospital stay dictates.

The Fisher Houses are located at military and Veterans Affairs medical centers around the world, and on any given day, Fisher Houses can serve up to 1,300 families. "Since 1990, our impact on military families has been profound: we have served more than 455,000 families, offered 12 million days of free lodging, and have saved families more than \$575 million in travel and lodging costs," explains Ken Fisher, chairman and chief executive of Fisher House Foundation. "A long-term stay in hospital, often

thousands of miles from home, can lead to unmanageable burdens and significant expenses for family members needed to be part of their loved one's healing process. By alleviating the stress and financial burden, military families can, in turn, focus on what is important – caring for and being with their hero.

"At Fisher House, we believe that a family's love is good medicine," he adds. "When someone walks through the door of a Fisher House, we want them to know that the American public appreciates and honors their service and that of their family members. We are there to help them in their time of need."

The program originated with Fisher's great-uncle, Zachary Fisher, and his wife Elizabeth. "My uncle Zach was a builder and philanthropist who began his career in construction at just 16 and would ultimately use his resources and skills as a builder to launch Fisher House," Fisher recalls. "While he was unable to serve in the military due to a medical issue, my uncle Zach always had a great deal of respect and admiration for our men and women in uniform. Zach and Elizabeth dedicated more than



\$20 million to the construction of these comfort homes. Brick by brick, these houses were built, and a foundation was created for life-changing experiences for those who walk through our doors. It has been an absolute honor to uphold his legacy and continue his work in helping our nation's heroes."

Fisher himself is a co-managing partner at Fisher Brothers, a real estate development and management company based in New York

City. "While I have never worn a military uniform, leading Fisher House is a true honor and a small way that I can show my gratitude to the men and women who wear and have worn the uniform," he comments.

Fisher Houses are built on the campuses of Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense hospitals and have up to 21 suites with private bedrooms and baths; families share a common kitchen, laundry facilities, a warm dining room, and an inviting living room. Once built and dedicated, the Foundation gifts the Fisher House to the VA or DoD to manage and maintain. The commander or director of each medical center where the houses are located is responsible for establishing the eligibility, priorities, and selection criteria for families to stay. Family members can communicate directly with a Fisher House manager to learn more about requirements at a specific house.

"The families who stay in every Fisher House become the life-blood of the home," Fisher notes. "A product of our comfort homes that no one fully anticipated, and what sets us apart from hotels, is that Fisher House allows support systems to form in the homes between the families themselves. Our homes allow military families to come together and be there for each other – sharing the joy of the good days and the sorrows of the bad."

Fisher House Foundation pays for the construction and furnishing of each Fisher House through generous donations of individuals, organizations, and sponsors. The Foundation also engages the local community to contribute to the funds required for a new house.

One specific Fisher House serves a somber purpose, according to Fisher. "When I think about all of our houses, there is one house that always comes to mind that is truly a special and solemn place: That is our Dover House for Families of the Fallen and it is the only home we wish was never used," he discloses. "Locat-



ed at Dover Air Force Base, the Dover Fisher House serves as a refuge for families whose loved one was killed in the line of duty. When a service member dies, their remains return through Dover. Before this house was built, the only option for Gold Star families traveling to Dover was to stay at a motel, and we felt that these families deserved better. This home serves as a refuge for grieving families to rest, reflect and prepare for the unimaginable."

The Foundation also continues to help military families as they recuperate. "While we are proud to stand beside military families at their lowest of lows, it is one of our greatest joys to witness the triumphs of so many wounded warriors who turn to adaptive sports as part of their recovery," Fisher remarks. "We are humbled to sponsor the family programs at events like the Invictus Games and the Warrior Games and help families celebrate their loved one's healing victories."

The organization currently is on track towards its goal of having 100 houses, able to accommodate up to 1,400 families on any given night. "I think it is important to note that Fisher Houses are not just a wartime need," Fisher points out. "While they serve a critical function during times of conflict supporting those who have borne the battle, Fisher House was created during peacetime. Training mishaps, injuries and serious illnesses result in hospitalization for service members every day – just as accidents and illnesses can afflict their spouses or children at any time. Veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq will need treatment for decades to come, which is why we're building Fisher Houses at more VA hospitals to serve veterans of all eras.

"We are grateful for those who choose to respond to the call to support our military families," he adds. "We salute those who have joined us. The need has grown, and so our resolve to assist these families must grow as well."



## Beyond Houses

In addition to providing comfort homes for families, Fisher House Foundation offers a number of other programs that support service members, veterans and their families, including:

- **Hero Miles:** Life doesn't stop for military families when a loved one is in the hospital – children need to be raised and bills still need to be paid. The Hero Miles program uses donated frequent flyer miles to provide airline tickets to wounded, injured and ill service members and their families, allowing families to travel back and forth as needed.

- **Hotels for Heroes:** This program uses donated hotel points to provide free hotel rooms to military and veteran families whose loved ones are being treated when a Fisher House is either full or unavailable.

- **Fisher Service Award For Military Community Service:** The Fisher Service Award recognizes innovative programs for military and veteran communities, awarding a total of \$250,000 to be divided among the top applying nonprofits. Since the program began in 1999, it has distributed more than \$2.75M across 200 nonprofit programs.

- **Scholarship Programs:** Fisher House Foundation administers the Heroes' Legacy Scholarship for children of service members who have died or become disabled in the line of duty since 9/11 and the Scholarships for Military Children for children of active, reserve and guard, and retired service members. In addition, the Foundation sponsors scholarships for military spouses, and hosts a scholarship search engine for military families on its website.

- **Family Programs:** Fisher House Foundation sponsors family programs at the Invictus Games and the DoD Warrior Games so that families can celebrate their healing victories with their loved ones. Many times these same families stayed at Fisher Houses when their heroes were first injured or became ill. Through the family programs at these adaptive sporting events, Fisher House is there as they come full circle in their healing journey.

**For more information:**

<https://fisherhouse.org/>