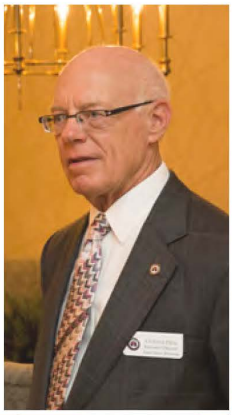

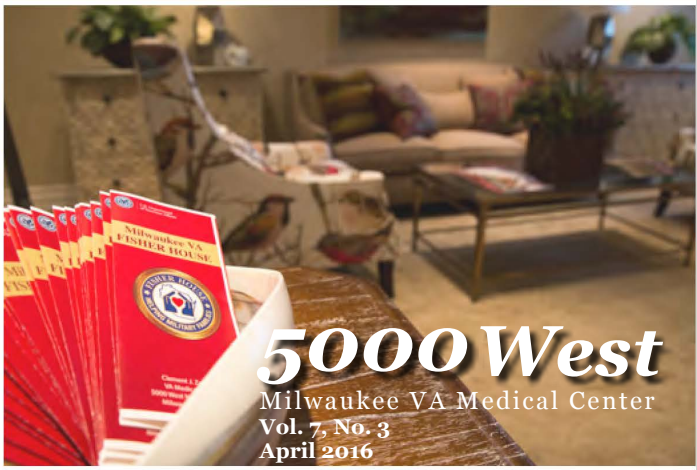

5000 West

Milwaukee VA Medical Center

Vol. 7, No. 3
April 2016

MILWAUKEE VA FISHER HOUSE
DEDICATION CEREMONY
SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2016
11 A.M. · MILWAUKEE VA CAMPUS

5000 W. National Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53295
Watch a time-lapse video of the construction on
www.facebook.com/milwaukeeva

Scan the QR code with your phone to see more information on the Fisher House Dedication!

search: milwaukeeva

flickr™

5000 West is a recurring magazine produced by the Public Affairs Office and Medical Media of the Zablocki VA Medical Center, and is intended for employees, volunteers, patients, and friends. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the medical center. While 5000 West encourages submissions for future editions, we cannot guarantee publication, and reserve the right to edit all copy so it conforms to editorial policy and guidelines. To submit information, e-mail: Public Affairs at VHAMIWPublicAffairs@va.gov or call the Public Affairs Office at 414-384-2000, ext. 45363.

On the Cover

Jennifer Kiefer is the the Milwaukee VA Fisher House manager. She is surrounded on the front page with scenes from our Fisher House you can learn more about inside. Find out more about Kiefer in a story on **Page 9.**

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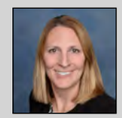

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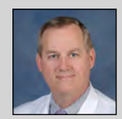

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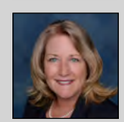

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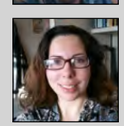

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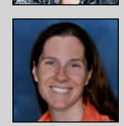


Christa Holland
Copy Editor

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Milwaukee VA Medical Center

FEATURE

A family's love is good medicine

A family's experience and children's donation make this place home

BY GARY KUNICH

The beds are made. The photos are on the walls. The books are on the shelves.

Everything is in place for this "home away from home" to start accepting its first guests.

But long before the April 23 ribbon cutting, the idea of a Fisher House to offer free housing to Veteran families was just a dream and millions of dollars away from reality.

The idea for this free housing first came from Zachary Fisher back in early 1990, and since then it served more than 250,000 families and saved them $282 million in lodging and travel costs. Fisher Houses — all 70 of them (68 in the United States, one in Germany and another in Great Britain) – are built strictly from donations, with many of those millions coming directly from the Fisher Family Foundation itself. While the foundation kicks in piles of cash, they do ask groups first hit certain financial milestones to see if it is feasible.

People in Milwaukee wanted to see one happen right here on the VA campus. Then the people of Wisconsin did something unheard of.

Hayden McDonald, 8, and his brother, Connor, 6, held a military-themed birthday party to collect money for the house and raised $2,000. An anonymous family gave $1 million. Others gave $5, $20 or more. Companies donated and so did ordinary citizens. And before the first shovel of dirt was carved in the ground June 3, 2014, more than half the money was raised for the project. Volunteers have continued to show their generosity with more money going to the construction and operating costs of the home.

"We had engagement from all different levels," said Andrea Potthast, who oversees marketing and donations. "From the boys giving up their birthday money to the private family donations, all the way to large foundations willing to give, every single one was important.

"A lot of the fundraising now has shifted to sustaining the house; a lot of things that make a house a home. The creature comforts like DVDs, gift cards for pillows, pictures, groceries. We want to make it a place where people can relax and feel like everything is taken care of for them."

Only a few weeks before the grand opening, Hayden and Connor got their run of the place to see how their $2,000 donation was spent.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

Michael and Kathy Halula get a sneak peak at the Milwaukee VA Fisher House, along with their son, David (backround). The family stayed at a similar Fisher House in Minneapolis after David recovered from a near-fatal car accident.

"It's really nice!" Connor said. "I think it's important because it's good how people are protecting our country, and we have to give them a place to stay if they get hurt."

When the two came up with the idea for a military party, their parents, Rob and Melissa, thought it would be a good idea to collect donations for the Fisher House.

"If we would have kept the money, I maybe would have bought a jet," Hayden said.

Both said they plan to raise even more money at their next birthday party.

Michael Halula made a point to thank the boys while they toured the home, because he benefitted firsthand from a Fisher House. His son, David, was driving home from Fort Carson, Colorado, with his family for a Christmas visit in 2007. He was due to deploy a couple months later.

"It was icy roads and a truck coming the other way jack-knifed and slammed right into them," Halula said.

"I don't remember anything from the accident," his son, David, added.

He was in a coma for five months.

The family flew out to help with the kids and stayed in places similar to a Fisher House. Then, when David transferred to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center to recover from his traumatic brain injury, they stayed for nearly a month in the Fisher House there.

"It's a Godsend, plain and simple," said Kathy Halula, David's mom. "There was already so much to worry about, but we didn't have to worry about a hotel and a hotel bill. There was always a warm meal."

"You could come back to the Fisher House," Michael Halula said, "and meet and talk to other families going through the same thing."

It's those types of stories that first got Curtiss Peck involved in the project. The executive director has been a part of the project since the beginning, when Dan Buttery, who served as the president

Continued on Page 10
See GOOD MEDICINE

Families, welcome to Fisher House

BY YANITZ IRIZARRY

You and your family have journeyed to see a loved one in the hospital. You're worried about whether or not they will be alright, and everyone is mentally and physically exhausted. You think to yourself, "At least VA gave me a place to stay the night. There is no way we could afford this trip on our own."

Taking care of this need and recognizing that a 'family's love is a good medicine' demonstrates the Fisher House mission. Now Milwaukee has a way to provide for these in a gorgeous setting right on the Zablocki campus.

At 13,000 square feet, the Milwaukee VA Fisher House is full of luxury behind every door. The two-story Carolina Rose brick, features robust white pillars in front of the entryway and white shutters encasing each window. The flag pole stands tall, waving the Fisher House flag.

As you enter the foyer through double French doors, a sense of calmness flows over you as you stand on 18-inch porcelain tiles and walls covered in a luxurious gold bamboo texture. Leading through two entryways, rising tall like sentries, are two white contemporary, floor-to-ceiling columns, seeming to serve as gatekeepers to the house. Scattered throughout the house are black and white, handpicked photos depicting Wisconsin residents and agriculture, as well as calming earth-tone canvas paintings.

At the end of the foyer stands a bronze bust of the Fisher House founders, Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher, greeting all those who enter with a smile.

Through the foyer, you view a library, speckled with tabletop pottery and a lux décor lounge area wrapped in modern Belgian-designed wallpaper. On the white bookcase, nestled under a single flower green vase, lie treasures in frilly metallic inks and canvas hardbacks among them, "The Da Vinci Code," "The Rainmaker," "The Beach House," and other tomes.

> "You think to yourself, this could be home."

Plush seating in a mix of complementary prints rest staunchly above an oversize rug. It seems to say, "Take a seat and rest your eyes, mind and heart" In the room's center lies a brass-trimmed glass coffee table, surrounded on either side by two high-back chairs accented in a bird motif. Matching window draperies pull the room together.

Across the room, through the foyer's double pillars, sits a dining room, complete with five sets of 55-inch black granite circular tables. Each table is surrounded by plush blue green textured high back cloth dining room chairs, crowned with a golden pillar candle chandelier. On the wall, a large print shows Zachary and Elizabeth

PHOTOS BY YANITZ IRIZARRY

Fisher smiling at their environment. The center dining table is paired with five wooden chairs decorated by a wooden box with brass detail, filled with an array of multicolored floral arrangements. The back wall features a grey wooden buffet table; where a black metal holder displays a large Fisher House book with the slogan, "Because family's love is a good medicine."

The black granite continues into the kitchen, complemented by a 3-inch tall earth tone backsplash. Pairs of black and silver appliances are contrasted by brilliant white cabinets, and Eclipse Ocean textured wallpaper. What seem to be tall white cabinets along the wall are actually four refrigerators. In the center of the room a massive 3-by-10-foot solid slab black granite island makes a statement of grandeur.

This layout centers on two black dishwashers sandwiched between two stainless steel free-standing sinks surrounded by vast counter space, which provides an everyday platform for espresso machines, coffee makers, mixers and slow cookers. On either side is a black microwave doubling as a range hood above an electric stovetop. Matching double ovens are on opposing sides of the kitchen, with a breakfast bar leading into the living room.

In the living room, posh seating faces a large 55-inch flat screen television. Through it, a porch seated comfortably below a white pergola, provides an optimal view overlooking Milwaukee VA hospital.

At the end of the foyer, the Founders Bust, wrapped in a winding mahogany wood staircase with connected by white spindles, adorning the railing. A golden-brown stair runner with brass rods carefully holds the carpet in place, topped by a massive golden chandelier.

Upstairs are eight more light taupe carpeted suites numbered clockwise from the top of the stairs, with warm, wood floors in the hallway.

The rooms are similar, but unique in décor. Each contains a spacious private bathroom with an enormous mirror framed in a thick golden bronze casing; and a walk-in shower with a pull-down seat. A nightstand, lamp, telephone, mirror, a couple pieces of artwork, a dresser resting below, an alarm clock radio with the ability to charge your smart phone, and double trimmed Egyptian cotton sheets, color coded by size, complete the space.

The best view in the house has to be in the upper right corner, room 205. To the right, just above the pergola, there is a perfect view of the Milwaukee VA hospital. At the far end of the room, you can see the Fisher House flag waving in the air, overlooking VA's historic district, Old Main and iconic Miller Park.

You think to yourself, this could be home.

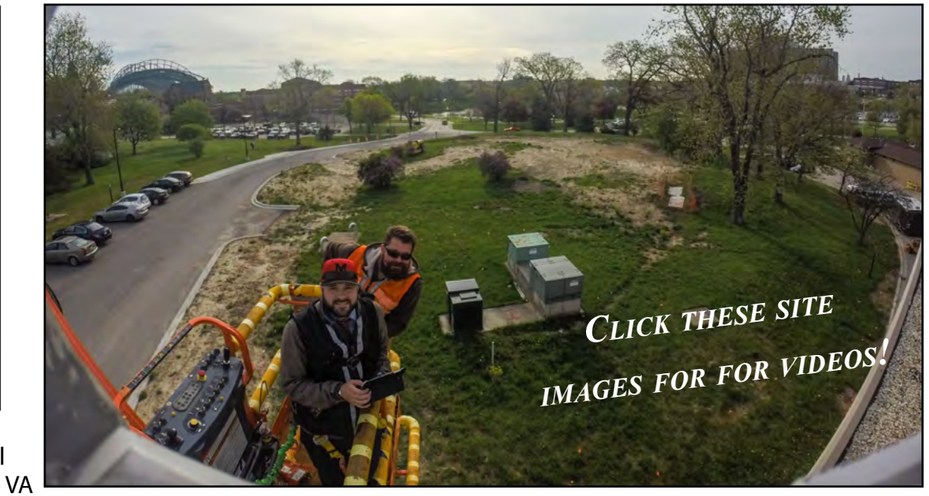
It has been a long day, you get in the shower, turn the nickel handle and a rush of warm water caresses your skin with just the right amount of pressure. You turn in for the night and wake up refreshed.

Today will be a brighter day; you'll take the shuttle to see your Veteran, because a family's love is a good medicine.

From our family to yours, this is your home. Stay as long as you need.

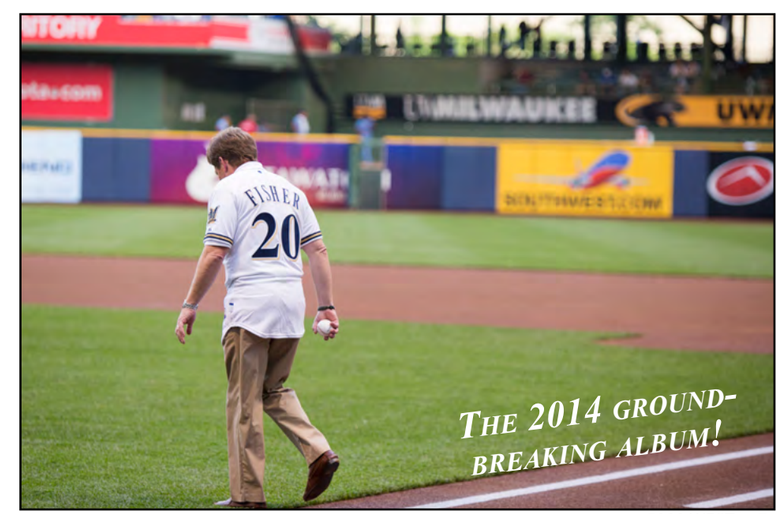
OPPOSITE PAGE FROM TOP: Living room, the Wisconsin motif, fleur-de-lis on an end table CURRENT PAGE: Library, kitchen, bathroom, Milwaukee VA's Historic District and Miller Park Stadium from room 205.

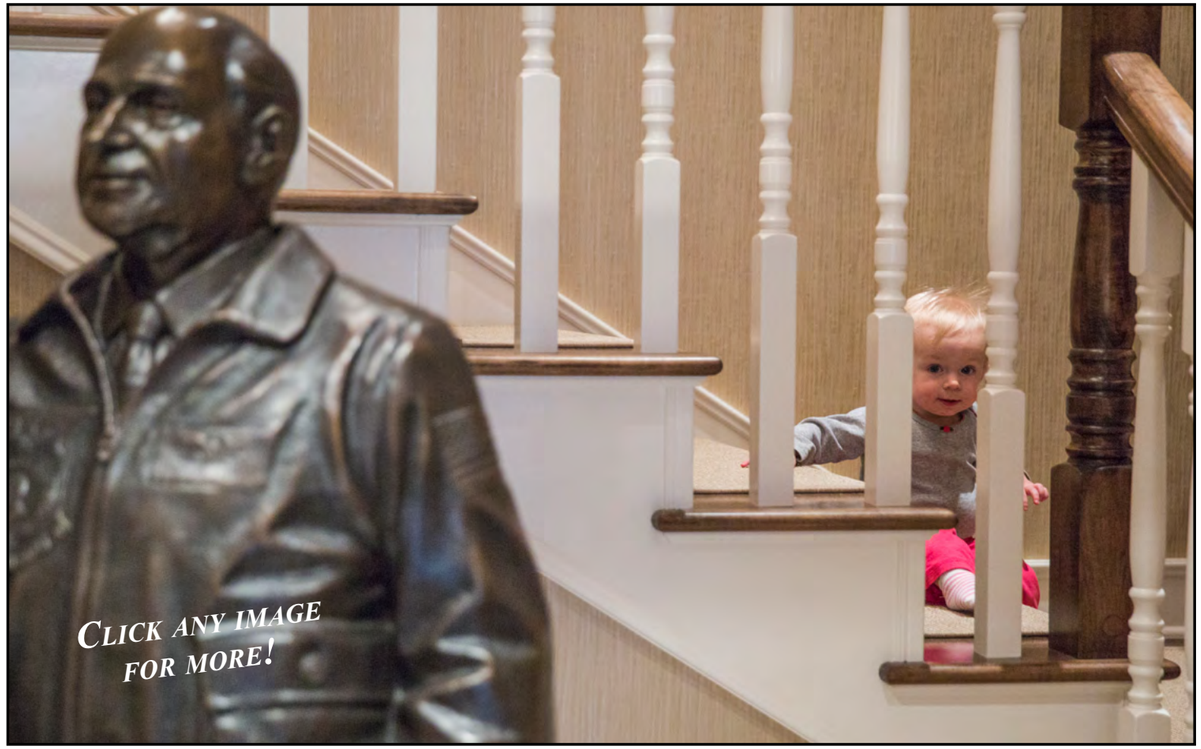
PHOTO FEATURE

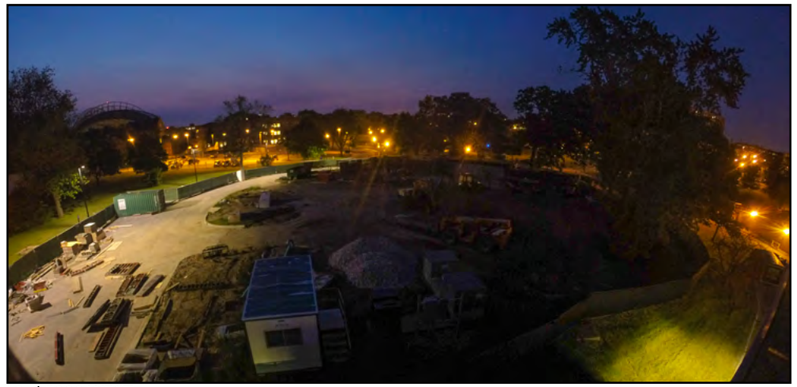


In and around Milwaukee VA Fisher House (clockwise): Curtiss Peck, executive director of Fisher House Wisconsin, talks with a group of future volunteers who will be dedicated to assisting the families during their stay. | A front view of Milwaukee VA Fisher House. | VA employees set up a time-lapse camera to overlook the constuction site two days after the June 2014 groundbreaking. In all, the employees swapped the camera memory card every six days from June 2014 to January 2016 shooting more than 750,000 images. | A now-and-then image! Click the image to watch a time-lapse video of the entire construction process or visit www.milwaukee.va.gov to view. | Ken Fisher walks to the pitcher's mound at Miller Park following the groundbreaking of our Fisher House in June 2014. Fisher threw the first pitch to Jonathan Lucroy, a helping hand in the Veteran community. | Curtiss Peck interviews with local media during an open house for southeast Wisconsin media outlets. VA and Fisher House staff provided tours to media and a previous residents of a Fisher House in Minneapolis. | David Halula (right) and parents Michael and Kathy Halula, chat with Gary Kunich from Public Affairs during the media day. David, a Veteran, was severely injured and in a coma for more than five months. His family stayed at a Fisher House during his recovery. "It was a Godsend," said David's mother. "There was already so much to worry about, but we didn't have to worry about a hotel bill. There was always a warm meal." | Back in June 2014, the future Fisher House was a pile of dirt. Dignitaries at our Fisher House site take the first ceremonial shovel to kick off the construction.

PHOTOS BY BENJAMIN SLANE







In and around Milwaukee VA Fisher House (continued): **A toddler navigates the stairs behind the life size bust of Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher. | Fisher House residents have the choice of bringing their own books or lounge and read the books at the first-floor library. | Fisher House site in July of 2016 just before dawn with the unique Miller Park Stadium.**

Home away from home

Understanding a need through a life changing experience

BY YANITZ IRIZARRY

She is once again in the hospital, surrounded by scurrying nurses, doctors, staff, beeping machines and a sick child. Desperately waiting for her 3-year-old daughter to get better, she stays at her bedside for yet another night.

She didn't think she'd be back here, back in this same situation after doctors removed her daughter's first kidney when she was only 8 months old. But now the tumors were back on the right kidney.

The doctors tell her, no matter what they do, due to a genetic disorder, they'll keep coming back. They have to take her last, remaining kidney.

Fortunately, for Jennifer Kiefer, she was a perfect match and could share a kidney with her daughter Kennedy.

Three years later, the Milwaukee VA Fisher House manager, has never forgotten those agonizing days and nights in the hospital.

"I've been in that same situation," said Kiefer. "I never left my daughter's side, being that she was so young in the hospital."

Now as the Fisher House manager, she will be able to help provide a home away from home for families in similar situations at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center. When the Fisher House officially opens April 23, it will provide 16 private suites for families of Veterans getting care at VA, along with a living room, library, well-stocked kitchen and even toys for children.

"This year has been all about getting things ready for Fisher House," said Kiefer. "I am excited to open the doors, engage with families and engage with Veterans."

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jennifer Kiefer and daughter Kennedy.

Kiefer oversees both temporary lodging programs at Milwaukee VA for Veterans and their families who live more than 50 miles away. The Milwaukee VA Fisher House lodging is geared toward supporting families, while the hoptel lodging is strictly for Veterans.

"The thing people have to remember is that what is provided to the Veterans (at the hoptel) is at no cost to them; it is what the government provides," she said. "This Milwaukee VA Fisher House is not provided by the government. It was built half by the Fisher House Foundation and half by community raised funds."

Although the 13,000-square-foot building cost more than $6.2 million, half that was raised before the construction team put one shovel in the ground.

Kiefer started at VA in 2007 as a social worker on the Iraq and Afghanistan outreach polytrauma team. The Fisher House position was an extension of a job she already loved.

> "I NEVER REGRETTED IT. I LOVED EVERY MINUTE OF IT."

"I felt when this position opened up, this was something I could really do. I really liked the job I was in, so I wasn't too sure if I should go for it," said Kiefer. "I never regretted it. I've loved every minute of it."

Kiefer knows firsthand just how much of a difference Fisher House could make on a family in distress.

"I know what it is like," she said. "I stayed a lot of time at Children's Hospital. I would stay at the hospital two to three nights on a pull-out couch.

"Sometimes you just want a break to get away from the doctors, the beeping machines."

Kiefer's daughter, now 6, is healthy and leading a full life three years after the transplant. But that memory so many years ago is what drives her commitment to Fisher House.

"I feel like doing this job," she said, "is exactly what I was meant to be doing."

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Jennifer Kiefer and then 3-year-old daughter Kennedy.

Who is eligible to stay in the Fisher House?

- Family members or caregivers of Veterans receiving care at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.
- Who live more than 50 miles from Milwaukee VA Medical Center.
- Guests must be medically stable and able to independently care for themselves in the home or have someone with them to assist with cares.
- The must have active engagement in the healthcare of the Veteran.

Is there a charge to stay at the Fisher House?

No, there is no charge to stay at a Fisher House. Guests are asked to bring their own food and personal items. However, any food donated to the Fisher House will be available for the guests at no cost.
A "Meal Train" website will be used for outside organizations to coordinate meals as well as an event calendar to offer activities.

How are guests referred to the Fisher House?
A VA social worker or medical provider will conduct an initial screening with the Veteran to determine if a referral to Fisher House is appropriate. The Fisher House manager will determine the eligibility and advise the family on the status of the referral and of room availability. Rooms are assigned on a first-come-first-serve basis. We may not know day-to-day if a room is available.

What happens if the Fisher House is full and a family is in need of lodging?
There are additional resources through the Fisher House to financially assist families with hotel accommodations until a room in Fisher House is available.

How long can a guest stay at the Fisher House?
So long as the Veteran is hospitalized, the guest can stay in the house. Family members are asked to check out within 24 hours of a Veteran's discharge from the hospital.

Can Veterans stay in the Fisher House?
The mission of the Fisher House is to provide lodging services to families and caregivers. The VA medical center provides Veteran lodging through our hoptel program which would be the appropriate referral source for a Veteran requesting lodging.

Who should I contact for volunteering at the Fisher House?
Please contact the Fisher House manager to discuss volunteer opportunities within the house. Jennifer Kiefer, (Jennifer.Kiefer@va.gov.) If you are interested in volunteering for any Fisher House Wisconsin events, contact the Fisher House of WI Organization at: www.fisherhousewi.org.

How can someone donate to the Milwaukee VA Fisher House?

There are three ways to support the Milwaukee VA Fisher House.

- Non-monetary donations can be brought to Milwaukee VA Fisher House directly. Please contact the Fisher House manager to arrange for delivery, (Jennifer.Kiefer@va.gov.)
- Monetary donations can be directed to the Milwaukee VA Fisher House either through Voluntary Services, 414-384-2000, ext. 41803, or to Fisher House. Please indicate on the check donation is for Milwaukee VA Fisher House.
- Monetary donations can also be addressed to the Fisher House of Wisconsin organization which raises money to maintain and support the Milwaukee VA Fisher House.

GOOD MEDICINE

Continued —
through the groundbreaking, reached out to him. Peck, who served in the Air Force from 1966 to 1970, is also the commander of the Harley-Davidson American Legion Post and a treasurer for the American Legion Riders. His son, a Marine Corps captain, has been in the military since 2004.

"I had no clue what a Fisher House was, but as soon as he told me, I was absolutely on board," Peck said. "You know, when we, in the military, deploy, we have a hundred buddies who go with us, who we can commiserate with. But it's the families left behind who really sacrifice. They have to take care of the expenses, the home, the house and all the other finances, the kids and the stress if their loved one gets hurt. This takes away some of that stress."

Before the 2014 groundbreaking, it all became more real for Peck when he saw the sign go up announcing the future site of the Fisher House.

"That made it a lot more real," he said. "And the people of Wisconsin are always very supportive of veteran causes and incredibly generous. Everyone is touched by a veteran — be it a spouse, a brother, an aunt or uncle, grandma or brother. Everyone understands this, and they were happy to make this a reality."

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

Connor (left) and Hayden McDonald check out the Fisher House. The two held a military-themed birthday party and raised $2,000 for the building.

Kayleen's KITCHEN

Kayleen Wichlinski
Registered Dietitian

We're approaching warmer weather which means chilled foods are coming back our tables. And, when you're not quite ready for a full meal, healthy snack options are every dietitian's dream. Instead of reaching for the same old chip and dip combinations, try adding some pizazz to your everyday snack routine. Salsa and guacamole might be healthy and delicious options, but eating too many chips may ruin your health-conscious endeavors.

For your next snack adventure, try creating your own homemade dip. If you love hummus, an edamame dip is a nice variation to it. Protein-packed edamame, fresh cilantro, and creamy avocado combine to make a dip that will satisfy your hunger cues. Edamame is an immature soybean. About ½ cup of edamame out of the pods provides about 120 calories, 9 grams of fiber, 2.5 grams of fat, and 11 grams of protein. Edamame also contains vitamin C and vitamin A — two key antioxidants.

Add some fresh cilantro, avocado, lime juice, a dash of hot sauce (and a few other ingredients), and you have a fresh, healthy snack at your fingertips. Even better, use freshly cut vegetables to scoop up your edamame dip.

Eating a healthy diet also includes healthy snacking. The next time you run through your local grocery store, instead of picking up a packaged dip or salsa, try making this recipe at home. Your body will thank you for eating well.

Recipe of the Month

Edamame Dip

Ingredients

12-16 oz cooked, unshelled edamame, fresh or frozen
½ cup packed chopped cilantro
½ cup plain low-fat yogurt
1 avocado, peeled, pitted, and roughly chopped
½ cup water
¼ cup lime or lemon juice
5 dashes hot sauce (or to taste)
3 drops sesame/olive oil (or to taste)
Sea salt, to taste

Directions

1. Place cooked edamame in a food processor. Pulse until smooth.
2. Add cilantro, pulse again.
3. Add remaining ingredients until pureed and well combined. Add more water as needed.
4. Serve with fresh vegetables, pita chips, etc.

PHOTO BY BENJAMIN SLANE

Jennifer Kiefer and Kayleen Wichlinksi hold a bowl of freshly-made dip. Kiefer is the manager of Milwaukee VA Fisher House which opens April 23.

In Service

Congratulations to the following Milwaukee VA employees who reached career milestones in April 2016:

30 Years of Service
Janet Jagielski
John Vaccaro

25 Years of Service
Raymond Konz-Krzyminski

20 Years of Service
Saquanna Carrillo
Terry Dotson
Edward Eisenhauer
Ronald Jones
David Tuttle

15 Years of Service
Shawn Cera
Catherine Ehlen
Kim Foster
Diana Glaunert
Margaret Hoyt
Andrew Jacobs
Jeannie John
Judith Luedke
William Obrien
Wendy Patz-Hutwagner
Dawn Potis
Sandra Radtke
Sheila Scott
Valecia Suide
Lory West
Winifred White

10 Years of Service
Anita Beaudry
Karen Bergevain
Jason Borgwardt
Nakisha Cannon
Guan Chen
Charles Curtis
Thomas Dentice
Diane Dewinter
Carol Jackson
Alexandra Kolintzas
Daryl Landskron
Harold Lenett
Nicholas Liegler
Gwen Loberger
Sara Loch
Calen Mchenry
April Miller
Carl Mueller
Jessica Staff
Erika Weber
James Weinert
Duane Westcott Jr.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

March 2016
Sam Wright
Employee Education

"Sam assumed the position of acting manager, Employee Education department, months ago when there were a number of staffing changes. He has served in that position admirably while also carrying on his duties as a training specialist and TMS administrator. He treats staff with respect and honesty and is certainly forthright when dealing with problems and minor crises. Sam's contribution helps our mission serving Veterans every day."

VA VOICES

How do you think Fisher House will serve our Veterans?

Ken Franklin, EMS: "I think anything that is here to help Veterans is a good thing. So if it helps the family of the Vet, it is a good thing."

Veronica Davis, QM&S: "It is a good thing and attracts a variety of Veterans from other areas outside of Milwaukee. It is great for the facility and state; people can see what VA has to offer."

Matt Behrend, FM: "It'll give Vets and their families peace of mind; one less thing to worry about. So, it's a great thing for our campus."

Patty Davis, DAV: "The spouse of a Veteran traveled here and she had a stroke while he received care for two months and paid two months of lodging. Fisher House will help family members like her."

Ciana Wedgeworth, CLC: "I think it's a good thing. When your loved one is in the hospital, you worry about where you are going to stay, or how much it will cost. They can be near their loved one."