

Zachary Fisher's dedication to veterans and their families was unwavering, and when the need for comfort housing for veteran families was brought to his attention, he didn't stop until something was done.

THE BLUEPRINT

To combat the often difficult bureaucratic process, Zachary organized a system that combines the best efforts of both the private and public sectors. Fisher House works with the Department of Defense and VA to find out where the greatest need is and utilizes funds raised within the organization to construct new housing. Once a Fisher House is built, it is gifted to the military and VA to be owned and operated by the government.

It's a partnership that has worked many times, with over seventy-five houses built nationally, two built internationally, and plans for more. Ken points out that the unique private-public ownership ensures that the areas with the most need are the ones being served and that new Fisher Houses are only built where demand is high.

Staffing for each house is the responsibility of the DoD and VA. Funds are raised to build new houses through a combination of community efforts and donations to the Fisher House Foundation, and once enough money is raised, the organization works with a number of trusted contractors across the country to begin the groundbreaking process.

Fisher Houses are built to match the architecture and design style of the surrounding area and can accommodate between sixteen and forty-two people, depending on the square footage.

Almost all of the homes are accessible for people with disabilities. "We don't skimp on these houses," says Ken, "in the sense that we build at the best quality for the men and women who will be staying there because we owe them so much. We feel as though that is our obligation, and we want to live up to that."

SO MUCH MORE THAN FOUR WALLS

The only requirement for a family to stay at a Fisher House is that it has a loved one undergoing treatment at a military or VA hospital that is at least 50 miles from their home; the foundation currently has enough housing to accommodate nearly 1,000 people per day.

But perhaps more important than the bed to sleep in is the camaraderie built within the walls of a Fisher House, between families who are all experiencing similar circumstances and work together to support one another. "When a family comes to stay at a house, they come in stressed," Ken says. "Life doesn't stop when a loved one is in the hospital, and so many times these family members have to be the primary health care advocates. They have to be there."

Though a Fisher House is not a counseling center or group therapy, it can be a healing experience for a family going through the unimaginable. With a common kitchen, dining area, and laundry facilities in each house, Ken says that families often cook together, eat together, and do chores together, which makes for a wonderful bonding opportunity—and the chance to help care for one another when necessary.

"The meals are really a central point of the Fisher House experience," notes



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