

Distributor Chairs Drive to Fund Illinois Fisher Houses

DMS Pharmaceutical Group is chairing a campaign to raise funds toward the construction of two Fisher Houses to be located in Illinois, a \$7 million project.

Serving as volunteer co-chairs of the non-profit Fisher Houses for Illinois Fund are Sam Lazich, president of DMS Pharmaceutical, and Bill Anderson, executive vice president of this full-line distributor of pharmaceuticals and medi-

cal supplies, based in Park Ridge, Ill.

The Fisher House program provides “a home away from home” for families of patients receiving medical care at major military and VA medical centers. There are now 34 Fisher Houses with others in design or construction phases. Families of military personnel may stay in the facilities free of charge.

This program meets a humanitarian need not normally provided for by the de-

partments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The first phase of the Illinois campaign will raise funds for a \$3.5 million Fisher House on the grounds of Edward R. Hines Jr. VA Hospital near Chicago, a polytrauma site which serves 70,000 Illinois veterans plus those from 16 other states. This 21-suite Fisher House is targeted for completion by the end of 2009.

The campaign’s second phase will raise funds to construct a Fisher House at



Jeffrey Gering, front left, the acting director of Hines VA Hospital, reviews viable Fisher House sites with volunteers in the Fisher House for Hines project. From left: Pat Quinn, lieutenant governor of Illinois; Bill Anderson, executive vice president of DMS Pharmaceutical Group and fund-raising drive co-chair; Tammy Duckworth, director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and honorary project chair; E. Ratcliffe Anderson Jr., surgeon general, USAF, retired, and Fisher House trustee; and Sam Lazich, president of DMS Pharmaceutical Group and drive co-chair. Hines is one of the VA’s polytrauma sites treating younger veterans coming back from Iraq with multiple injuries.



Jerry Schutter, left, chief of the Blind Rehabilitation Center at Hines, reviews the center's mission with leaders of the Fisher House project. With Schutter, left to right, are a veteran patient from Michigan; Sam Lazich, president of DMS Pharmaceutical; Tammy Duckworth, director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs; and Pat Quinn, Illinois lieutenant governor.

North Chicago VA Medical Center.

"The Fisher House for Hines will welcome military veterans' families where they'll stay free of charge in compassionate environments for as long as necessary — weeks, months — to support their loved ones," said Lazich.

Among the planned fund-raising activities are a May 23 benefit event hosted by DMS Pharmaceutical and a Chicago-wide radio telethon during National Military Appreciation Month.

According to plans, some \$3.5 million in funds raised by Fisher Houses for Illinois will be matched by the National Fisher House Foundation, which will handle the architectural, site, bid process, construction, and furnishings responsibilities. Once completed, the two new Fisher facilities will be handed over to the U. S. government as gifts.

The honorary chair of the fund-raising drive is Tammy Duckworth, Iraq war veteran and director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. Duckworth, of the Illinois Army National Guard, personally experienced the benefits of the Fisher House program during her recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., following Iraq combat injuries.

Duckworth and her husband, Capt. Bryan Bowlsbey, shared a 13-month stay as guests of the Fisher House while Duckworth endured multiple surgeries

and intensive rehabilitation from the loss of both legs and a severely damaged arm.

"Fisher House was there for me even before I woke up from my coma," Duckworth says. "Having my family near me made all the difference in my recovery. Our wounded warriors deserve the best care. A Fisher House in Chicago means family members, who are one of the key components to recovery, can afford to be near their loved ones and assist in their treatment."

Hines is largest VA facility in Illinois and is home to a number of specialized programs such as the new Spinal Cord Injury and Blind Rehabilitation centers.

The organizers of the Illinois fund-raising

Fisher House project leaders visit Hines VA Hospital's Spinal Cord Injury Center. From left, Tammy Duckworth, honorary chair of the fundraiser; Sam Lazich, president of DMS Pharmaceutical and fund-raising drive chair; and E. Ratcliffe Anderson Jr., Fisher House trustee. They're with one of the center's patients who's going through his exercise routine.



ing drive say they are hopeful that the campaign will be supported by drug manufacturers, wholesale distributors, pharmacists and others in the health-care field.

Lazich adds, "We invite businesses and individuals interested in serving on the board spearheading this building drive, in volunteering or donating to the cause, to e-mail benefit@dmspharma.com, or call the Fisher Houses for Illinois Fund coordinator at 847-518-1100, ext. 234."

Since 1990 when the Fisher House program was founded by Zachary Fisher, it has offered more than two million days of lodging to over 70,000 families, saving them some \$60 million in lodging costs as well as other costs.

Since 1990, over 70,000 families have been helped by the Fisher House program

The homes typically are located within walking distance of the treatment facility, or have transportation available. Fisher Houses can accommodate 16 to 42 family members. Operation and maintenance of the houses can cost some \$180,000 each year.

Effective last October, room fees for guest families at all Army, Navy and Air Force Fisher Houses are paid by Fisher House Foundation. There are no room fees at Fisher Houses operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. For more on the program, visit fisherhouse.org. 