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## St. Louis may get its own Fisher House

By [Mary Delach Leonard](#)ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH  
02/01/2007

The homes give families of wounded soldiers a low-cost place to stay near their loved ones.

A comfortable bed. Kitchen and laundry facilities. A quiet place to relax or watch TV.

Sometimes, a few basics of life can make a big difference for families of wounded soldiers and veterans being treated at the nation's military and veterans hospitals.

Families of patients served by the St. Louis VA Medical Center would find such a haven at a 21-bedroom facility proposed for Jefferson Barracks by the Fisher House Foundation.

"Family love is good medicine, and we want to make sure families can stay with their loved ones during their treatment and rehabilitation without enduring extreme financial hardship," said Jim Donahoe, a retired Air Force colonel who is spearheading a campaign to raise local funds for the project.

Fisher Houses provide free short-term lodging, including private bedrooms and shared kitchen, laundry and living areas. The houses are often likened to Ronald McDonald Houses, which serve families of children being treated for serious illnesses.

Donahoe said the local campaign's goal is to raise \$2.5 million, about half the cost of construction and furnishings. The remainder would be contributed by the Fisher House Foundation, which has built 37 comfort homes nationwide at military installations and veterans medical centers. Construction in St. Louis could begin in 2008.

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The foundation's goal is to build 20 additional Fisher Houses during the next four years to help meet the growing needs of military personnel injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Jim Weiskopf, a foundation spokesman.

Weiskopf said the foundation is currently focussed on serving the needs of combat casualties. The St. Louis medical center was chosen because it is a polytrauma site that offers rehabilitation programs for such severe injuries as amputations, blindness, burns, and spinal cord and brain trauma.

"Even when the war is over, the houses will stay full. The veterans' needs will remain," Weiskopf said.

Government funds cannot be used for construction, but when the homes are completed they are deeded to the military or to the VA, which assumes responsibility for upkeep.

Weiskopf said communities are encouraged to help fund the houses to ensure a feeling of local ownership, but failure to meet a financial goal would not necessarily prevent the foundation from building a Fisher House where there is need.

Donahoe said the campaign plans to begin contacting local corporations and service and veterans organizations during National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week, Feb. 11-17.

**For more information on Fisher Houses, visit [www.FisherHouse.org](http://www.FisherHouse.org) or e-mail Donahoe at [donahoejb@hotmail.com](mailto:donahoejb@hotmail.com).**

**Donations can be sent to: Fisher House Foundation, c/o Voluntary Services, 1 Jefferson Barracks Drive, St. Louis, Mo. 63125.**

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