



# Because of *Friends* Like You!

## Message From the President, Rocco Bagala

It is with deep appreciation that I express my sincere thanks to you, our donors, for supporting our shared values and mission to ease the burden of stress on active Military and Veteran families while their loved ones receive necessary medical care. We are grateful for your partnership. Your generosity has supported activities at all the Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound homes, including, but not limited to: the restoration of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System's Healing Gardens and landscaping, holiday lights, a new refrigerator for infant milk/formula, replacement of office furniture, refinishing of guest shower floors, Fisher House Anniversary event, "Guest Night In," bottled water services, cleaning, laundry, and carpet services, TV and technology services similar to home, fresh flower displays, weekly fresh donuts—because everyone needs a donut now and again, and other operational costs that provide restoration and healing for families. It is an honor to serve as president of this organization, and I look forward to supporting and expanding its services. Thank you for creating a "home away from home" for our Veteran families. Your contributions have made a profound impact on how families navigate through difficult times.



## Board of Directors

- Rocco Bagala - President
- John Park - Treasurer
- Joel Wirasnik - Secretary
- Gail Eck and Alan Myers - Directors
- Viviana Davis - Advisory
- Melanie Simmons - Advisory
- Elizabeth Wirasnik - Executive Director



*Veterans Day November 11, 2023  
Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound,  
commemorates those who have served and sacrificed.  
Thank you for the gift of liberty.*



*Because a family's love is good medicine.*



## Welcome - Alan Myers!

Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound is excited to welcome Alan Myers as our newest member to the Board of Directors! Alan brings a wealth of experience having served in the Marine Corps, flying reconnaissance aircraft in: supply, operations, intelligence, and maintenance. Alan possesses a unique skill set, being one of a few individuals certified on both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft. While working at Eastman Kodak, he provided services to the U.S. Military, NASA, and law enforcement. Alan also served 21 years in the Army National Guard. We are grateful to have Alan as a part of the Friends team; he shares our passion for supporting Veterans, families, and caregivers during times of medical need.

## Read About What Our Guests Have to Say...

- "The Fisher House is such a blessing & comfort in the storm. The staff is compassionate & caring & makes you feel so welcome. This is truly a port in the storm."
- "I felt welcome, safe, & important. It's hard to believe that all of this hospitality was at no cost to myself or my family. All I can say is thank you."
- "It provided much-needed respite. Fisher House is beautiful. Everything about it!"



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

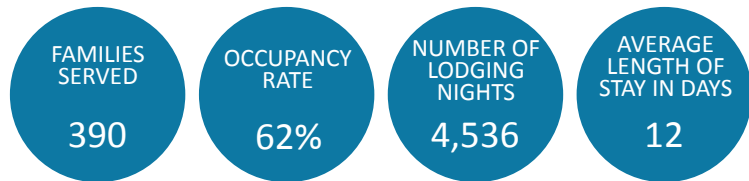
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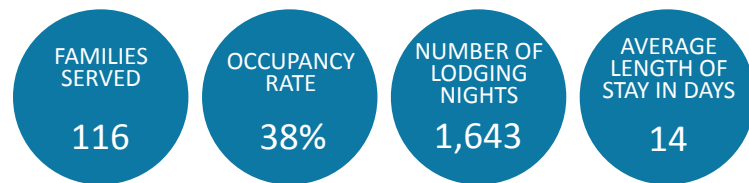
# Because of Friends Like You

## Donor Impact 2023

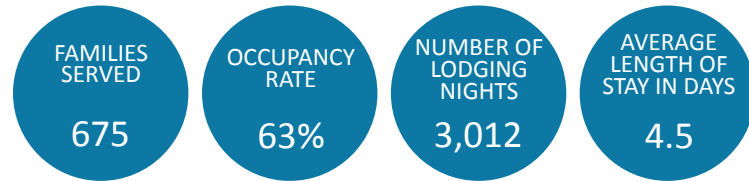
### SEATTLE



### JBLM



### PORTLAND



### Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound

#### Our priorities for guest programs and services:

- Provide the simple assurance of knowing what is for dinner with: well-stocked kitchen for everyday, groceries for holidays, & special events
- Provide basic comforts of home: personal bedroom & bathroom, supplies
- Provide clean, safe, and healing indoor and outdoor spaces
- Assure access to transportation to accompany hospitalized loved ones
- Assure access to technology similar to home: internet, satellite TV, computer
- Provide a sense of camaraderie, family, and normalcy; compassionate care

## Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound

Our mission is to ease the burden on our active Military, Veterans, and their families during difficult times.

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered in Washington State, Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound, works to raise funds and awareness in support of the four Fisher Houses in the Puget Sound region. We are grateful for your partnership with us!

Charity Navigator 100% Candid



-Charity Navigator, a charity assessment organization, has certified Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound highly impactful with a perfect score of 100% in the following categories: fiscal responsibility, financial efficiency, sustainability, trustworthiness, and best practices for accountability and transparency.

-Candid is a public charity that collects, organizes, and presents information on non-profits. Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound has earned a 'Gold Transparency Seal' for its mission, legitimacy, impact, reputation, finances, programs, transparency, and governance.

### Because a family's love is good medicine.

#### Viviana Davis

Viviana, born in Lima, Peru, and raised in Kirkland, WA, is bilingual in English and Spanish. Married to Master Sergeant Justin Davis, they have three beautiful children and an Old English Bulldog named Roxi. Viviana earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and works as a Merchandise Manager at PepsiCo. Following her stay as a Fisher House guest, deeply grateful for the tender care she received there, Viviana began volunteering at the JBLM Fisher House. Viviana is excited to support the Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound. -Read more about Viviana in our newsletter and on our web page: [www.fisherhousevaps.org](http://www.fisherhousevaps.org)



#### Our Amazing Advisory Team!

#### Melanie Simmons

Welcome Home! Melanie has faithfully and diligently served active Military and retired Veterans at the Seattle VA for 25 years. Melanie shares, "I have a deep affection for our heroes, those we serve. As a former member of Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound for six years, I am excited to be a part of all that is happening today! I participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the Marianne Marks Garden as a memorial to my mother. I am honored to be a member of the Advisory Team. I enjoy spending time with the families; the time together is healing."



Meet our Incredible House Managers!

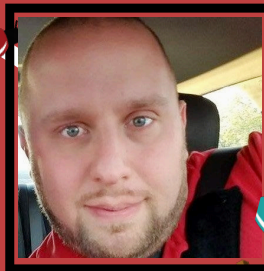


PSHCS Mgr. Mark Debenport



"I enjoy speaking with Veterans and their families about their military experiences and places they have lived around the world."

PSHCS Asst. Mgr. Glen Boje



"I appreciate the chance to reciprocate and gift back the incredible acts of kindness I received."

VA Puget Sound Health Care System Fisher House Seattle, Washington

JBLM Bus Mgr. Vattana Garcia



"This position is much more than a job. I am committed to providing compassionate support for our military families."

Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound

Because a family's love ...is good medicine.



JBLM Ops. Asst. Rachael Waters



"I enjoy working in an environment that gives back to the community. The JBLM Army Fisher House is a wonderful fit."

JBLM Ops. Asst. Letauaeletise Hunkin



"As a representative of the JBLM Army Fisher House, I look forward to aiding our military body during times of need and fostering connections with folks as they come to stay."

Joint Base Lewis-McChord Fisher Houses I & II Washington

Welcome James Dorce' - Our New Fisher House Manager VA Portland Health Care System, Vancouver, Washington

VA Portland Asst. House Mgr. Dawn L. Schultz

James served in the military for 22 years, and has a background in maintenance management, housing management, and supply management. James earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management. Currently, James is furthering his education and training in pastoral counseling.

"The courage displayed by our Veterans and family members always amazes me. Each family is unique with its own struggles and heartache. I am proud and honored to know that our team at the VA Portland Fisher House makes an impactful difference in their lives."

To read more about our incredible Fisher House teams, visit our webpage at: www.fisherhousevaps.org





*Because a family's love is good medicine...*

What's up Seattle? Healing Gardens Restoration  
Dancing With Our Heroes Vancouver!  
Precious Memories at JBLM

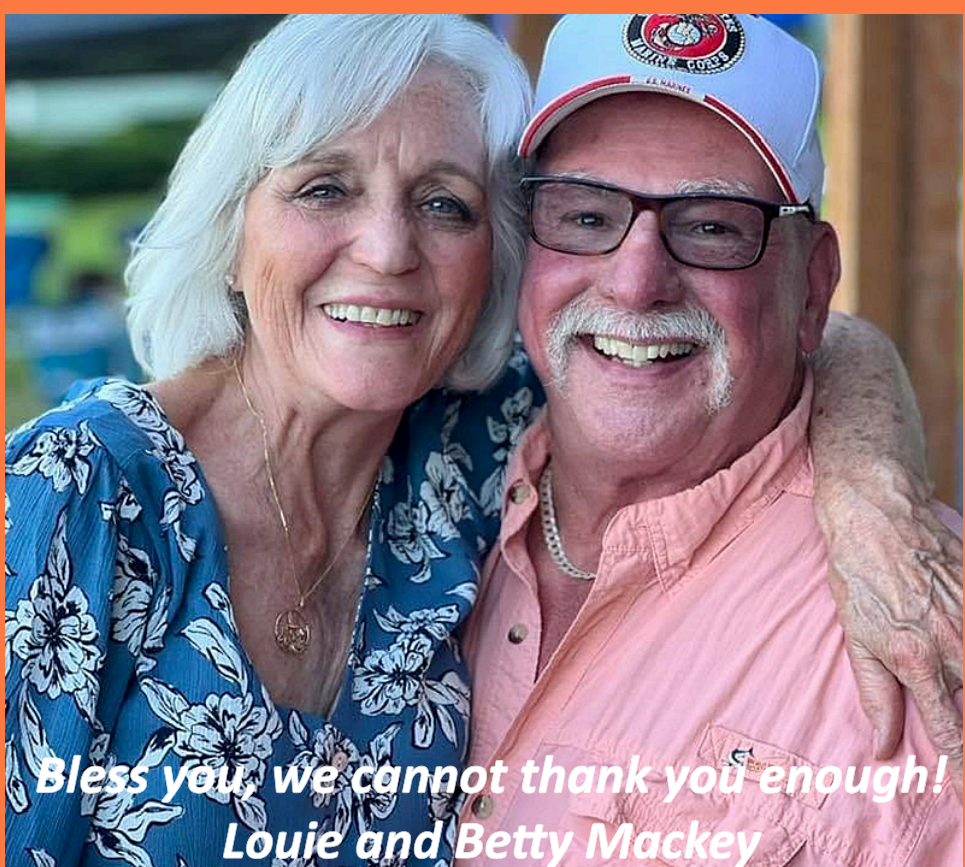


Letters to Service Members!





# Meet our Guests!



*Bless you. We cannot thank you enough!*  
**Louie and Betty Mackey**

This is our first time staying at the Fisher House in Seattle. My husband, Arthur L. Mackey (Louie), a Marine Corps Sniper in the Vietnam War and a disabled Veteran, had a serious fall. Louie hit his head and ended up with a significant brain bleed. I had no idea the Fisher House non-profit organization existed. The support provided for the families of our Veterans and active Military who serve and protect our country is truly amazing. The home is beautiful and comfortable, and just being able to be close to my husband is a blessing. My husband and I feel honored to help support this organization!

My name is Viviana, and I am married to Master Sergeant Justin Davis. We have three beautiful children and a bulldog named Roxy. In 2016, I had been experiencing unexplained, severe physical symptoms. When I sought medical care, I was misdiagnosed or dismissed by medical specialists. I was so busy with my young family that I did not advocate more on my own behalf. I trusted the medical community to provide quality care for me and was not aware the symptoms indicated a serious medical condition.

In 2020, our lives took a wild and unexpected turn. After several visits to the ER, we learned I had a large tumor and stage 3b colorectal cancer. My husband was standing beside me, holding my hand. Both of us in disbelief, not knowing what to do. I was only 34 years old. Will my little ones remember me? Will I see my son graduate from high school? Will I see my daughter get married? I need time--more time. The heartache and despair were deeply overwhelming. The treatments began. After an excruciating year of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgeries, I was declared cancer-free.



Stationed in Germany, the cancer recurred, now in stage 4. Our family was quickly ushered back to the United States for treatment. We encountered many obstacles trying to find a place to stay with three children. My hospital case manager contacted Fisher House. The Fisher House team welcomed our family with open arms. I felt peaceful. I was home.

*My family was welcomed with open arms. I felt peaceful. I was home.*

**Master Sergeant Justin & Viviana Davis**



To read more about Viviana and her important message to others struggling with unexplained illness, visit our webpage at: [www.fisherhousevaps.org](http://www.fisherhousevaps.org)

Viviana shares her very personal story in hopes of protecting and preventing others from experiencing the suffering she and her family continue to endure.



There were many doctor's appointments, all with negative reports and little hope for recovery or a future with my family. These were very dark days. The Fisher House Team did everything possible to ensure my young children, husband, and I would feel at home. I received immense love and care. Of great importance to me, the Team never limited the number of guests I could have. Friends came to care for my children and provide support. Accommodations were available without question. The House Managers, staff, volunteers, and other guests took time to listen and comfort me. Guests and family members stay at the Fisher House for serious medical reasons. We have that in common and lean on each other. I was embraced, and I knew I could reach out if I needed help. Their care for my family and me provided the strength I needed to move forward. At that time, I decided I would find a way to volunteer at the Fisher House. My family and I are forever grateful for the Fisher House, the Friends of Fisher House, and all the employees and volunteers. As I continue to navigate this cancer face and fight to prolong my life, I will continue to help those I can, when I am able. I encourage others to learn about the Fisher House and the Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound, to volunteer resources, and most importantly, to share the mission with others.

## Just Steps Away...

Christine Ingals & Steve Copple



I am writing this in week four of our stay at the Fisher House. In the building next door, only steps away, lives my 47-year-old stepson, Matt. Matt is living in the VA Community Living Center's Hospice Unit, dying of colon rectal cancer.

***Because the Fisher House exists, we can honor Matt's request to not die alone.***

Matt, a Navy Veteran, athlete, hiker, and bike racer, loved to count his steps. Even during his illness, he would report to us how he challenged himself to do more steps each day. Now, when we leave his bedside, we are able to reassure him that if you need anything, Matt, we're just next door, steps away. I expect him at some point to ask me, "How many steps, Christine?" But I haven't counted them. All I know is that he is close, and that's all that counts right now.

We are retired north of the Oregon Coast, living in Tillamook County. The drive from our small town is peaceful. We leave the ocean and head east along the Tillamook Forest to arrive in the Portland metropolitan area. During Matt's illness, his dad, me, and his mom made countless trips over the coast range. On a good day with good weather, no wrecks on the highway, and no animals crossing the road, it would take about 2 hours to get to Matt's appointment for the last two years.

We've always known this part of the journey would be before us. On day one of the diagnosis, we knew the cancer was not curable. Treatment to extend Matt's life, maybe 2 to 2 1/2 years, but not curable. We had to face the fact that treatment was no longer an option; the new road in front of us was finding hospice care for Matt. We were focused and hoping an opening would become available at the Community Living Center in Vancouver. We did not have the stamina or the time to consider where we would stay. Options were to stay with friends in PDX but still be too far from Matt in an emergency, or tap into retirement to pay for hotels and restaurants. We learned about Fisher House. This lit a candle, hoping there would be a place in the Fisher House inn where Matthew was transferred.

We got the call; there was an opening for Matt. Early one Monday morning, we threw together an overnight bag, drove to the Portland VA, and then followed Matt in his medical transport to Vancouver. Once settled in, we looked at each other and said, "Let's see about Fisher House." Not too good at protocol, we didn't wait for the social worker to guide us there. James answered the door and heard what I now believe must have sounded like a frantic story. His first question was, "Do you need somewhere tonight?" He assured us that once he received the referral from the social worker, we would have a room. We immediately knew we were going to be taken care of, but at that time we had no idea the extent of that care. We moved quickly into an impeccably clean, beautifully furnished, homelike setting. A kitchen with donated food in the refrigerator welcomed us, with many nights of homemade dinners from volunteers and many compelling stories told by other residents. Those who listen to our walk provide comfort and help us feel stronger. They understand the challenges of bearing witness to your loved one's suffering. We are steps away from him at night, which means we can try to sleep at night after difficult days. We don't face a hazardous coast range drive. We are tired, but we come home to Fisher House. We are steps away from a meal, a quiet talk on the deck, warm greetings from Dawn, James, or Bob, and Veterans and their families.

***We will forever hold Fisher House close to our hearts, remembering this part of the journey. We feel cared for here, where we are only steps away from saying goodbye to dear Matt.***

Matt passed away on September 15, 2023. Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound sends our heartfelt sympathy, peace, and comfort to Christine, Steve, Matt's mother, loved ones, family, and friends. It is with sincere gratitude that we thank you for sharing your story.

# Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound

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Email: [friends@fisherhousevaps.org](mailto:friends@fisherhousevaps.org)

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*Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound*

*... because a family's love is good medicine!*

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone if you want to be called: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my donation for: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: Friends of Fisher House Puget Sound

( ) This gift is in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

( ) This gift is in memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

( ) If you would like to notify someone that you have made an honorary or memorial gift, please provide the name(s) and address(es) so we can send a note on your behalf.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

( ) This gift is anonymous. Please do not list my name in any published texts.

( ) I was a guest of Fisher House.

( ) I would like to make a recurring gift using a VISA or MASTERCARD.

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Click on the "Donate" button.

