

Near VA hospital, a home for kin of wounded soldiers rises

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When Michelle Keating was offered the chance to help military families, she couldn't say no.

"It's an honor," she said. "I can't do enough to give back to these men and women."

Now Keating, who became the fund-raising chairwoman for Fisher House Boston about a year and a half ago, is one step closer to providing that help.

Fisher House, a national organization that provides free lodging to families of veterans who are receiving medical care at VA hospitals, broke ground on a West Roxbury facility last Thursday.

The milestone was two years in the making. After the proposal for the house was accepted by the organization, the local branch has been holding planning meetings with architects and finding builders, said Keating.

Fisher House has seen an increase in the number of families who need its services and is building 14 new houses nationally in 2009, but the one in West Roxbury is the first in the New England area, said Keating, who is the president of Alder Foods, which sells food to the military and has donated to Fisher House in the past.

"Because of the kind of war we are fighting, they're coming back with injuries that demand long-term care," she said.

The home will have 20 suites that sleep four people each, and residents will share a common room and kitchen area.

The house will take about a year to complete and will cost \$6 million, according to Keating. Though the Boston organization has made only \$200,000 toward its \$3 million goal, which the national organization will match, Keating said the responses to donation requests from all kinds of people make her confident the goal will be met.

"We get donations from \$2 to \$2,000," she said. "The checks that come in and the notes that go with them are so beautiful."

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