

# Philanthropic Event Aids the Military

## Fund-raiser benefits Fisher House.

By Sharon Allen Gilder  
The Almanac

Steven Lebling's Round Hill estate was rockin' for a good cause, Friday, July 11. Lebling was host to 300 guests who gathered in support of Fisher House, a not-for-profit, selected by CharityWorks as its 2008 partner. Non-stop music by Millennium filled the dance floor with attendees wearing summer resort casual attire. Food catered by Ridgewell's kept palates in step with the tropical tone set by a festively staged backdrop under the stars of palm trees, umbrellas, vibrant table covers and dramatic lighting.

**“Fisher House saves the cost of staying outside the system for 11,000 military families each year.”**

**-- Mary Considine, director of administration for Fisher House**

CharityWorks was founded in 1999 by Leah Gansler who was inspired by a group of friends to make a difference. Since its inception, the organization has raised more than \$7 million to support organizations in the Washington Metropolitan area by bringing local non-profits to the attention of sponsors. Gansler said her formula for success is based on the four f's: fun, food,

friends and funds. “We do all the due diligence to select the beneficiary every year,” Gansler said.

This year's selection, Fisher House, provides “comfort homes” for America's military families so they can remain together during extended treatment for serious illness or lengthy physical and/or occupational therapy.

CHARITYWORKS member Nancy Senich said, “Charity Works is a fabulous opportunity for folks to donate in a concentrated and meaningful way because you're dealing with people who know Washington in a knowledgeable way. There's a tremendous inside knowledge of need.”

She added, “Fisher House is a perfect example of an underserved community of local and national need. Our hope is to have a national footprint and help our nation's veterans. CharityWorks acts locally but effects globally. It is a powerful group of people who do things that affect the greater good. They know how to direct their talents and that makes a huge difference.”

Fisher House was established in 1990 by the late Zachary Fisher and his wife Elizabeth. The first house was dedicated in June 1991 at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. A second house opened a month later at the Forest Glen Annex to Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Currently, there are 38 houses throughout the United States and Europe with more under construction. Fisher Houses depend on public donations to continue supporting America's military in their time of need.

Monies raised through 2008 CharityWorks events will help fund the construction of a Fisher House at the Veterans Medical

Center in Washington, D.C. Major Daniel Gade, whose family spent 10 months at a Fisher House, attended Friday's gala. In a conversation with the CharityWorks Advisory Board, Gade said, "Having Fisher Houses built with private contributions sends a strong message that Americans care about us and our sacrifices."

CharityWorks member Mary Ann Judith said she was drawn to the event because, "It's for an incredible cause and my husband was a former Marine with Special Forces in Viet Nam."

She added, "My husband truly believes in our military. Bob went up to Daniel and said, "Thank you so much for your service."

Judith, a retired Montgomery County Police acting sergeant, said he earned degrees from the University Maryland after returning from Viet Nam. "My father bought a college ring for me, but I wear my Marine Corps ring every day to remember who was in my unit. I learned more about life in the military and how to deal with situations."

**MARY CONSIDINE**, director of administration for Fisher House, noted she began volunteering at Fisher House while in college and had no idea she would join the organization full time. "I was gone for four days and realized I couldn't go home without knowing I had helped someone each and everyday. We have direct impact everyday. Fisher House saves the cost of staying outside the system for 11,000 military families each year."

In addition to covering lodging expenses, Fisher House has booked over 14,000 tickets since 2004 through its Operation Hero Miles program which allows the public to donate frequent flyer miles to assist service members in Iraq and Afghanistan to return to the U.S. on rest and recuperation or emergency leave.

CharityWorks Executive Director Miriam Pollin said, "Because I care, I volunteered. It got serious for me." She added that she's met a lot of pretty special people who care, "They don't have to give back, but they can and they choose to. I work with people that care."

Potomac designer Cindi LaPietra of Bella Interiors said, "I think it's wonderful that Steve Lebling is generous enough to open up his home to CharityWorks to help the community."

Lebling put the finishing touch on sentiments echoed throughout the evening: "It's a fulfillment of a desire to give back to a cause that's unparalleled. It's a bi-partisan cause that we all not only do support but it is our duty to support."