

'It Was the Biggest Blessing'

A partnership between a Boston VFW Post, Fisher House of Boston and Enterprise provided much-needed assistance to a family during trying times

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When Tiffany Deen gave birth to her son, Jude, on April 25, 2020, after an emergency C-section, she wasn't allowed to hold him. Having been born without an esophagus, Jude was whisked away to a hospital two hours away. Deen's husband, Juan, was deployed with the Navy at the time.

For nine months, Tiffany lived out of a hotel in Macon, Ga., while Jude was being evaluated and treated. Juan was able to join her when Jude was 6 months old.

Everything changed for the family in December when Jude and his parents were flown to Boston Children's Hospital on a military transport. Fisher House of Boston placed the couple in an apartment through the Fisher House of Boston Hotel Program.

Tiffany said she was in awe of the situation. She had wondered where they would stay in Boston and how they would afford the stay. She said in addition to the apartment, they were given gift cards and vouchers, compliments of Fisher House of Boston.

"I thought this was too good to be true," she recalled. "The apartment was right next to the hospital, and it really felt like a home."

'THIS BABY PERSONIFIED OUR MISSION'

VFW Post 144 in Boston works with the Fisher House of Boston, particularly its hotel program.

According to past VFW Commander-in-Chief and member of Post 144 Paul Spera, the Post donated \$5,000 worth of \$50 gift cards to give to families staying at Fisher House of Boston.

He added that VFW National Headquarters also has provided families with cards, pens,

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

pencils and pads. These items go in gift bags with the VFW logo on one side and Fisher House of Boston on the opposite side.

Spera said that he learned the family was ready to go back home to Georgia, but they wouldn't be able to fly. Since it appeared renting a car was going to be the preferred mode of transportation, Spera contacted VFW National Headquarters, since it has an existing relationship with Enterprise.

It was against company policy for Enterprise to provide free transportation, so they offered a brand new minivan for a deeply discounted \$10-per-day rate for the family. Spera calculated that with a few nights on the road, gas, hotels, food and tolls, it would cost \$1,000 to get the family back home.

He took the request to his Post commander, who simply said, "Let's do it!" Spera said that at the end of the day, everybody felt really good about helping the family.

"My eyes got moist a couple of times through this," he said. "At my Post, we are all parents, and most of us are grandparents. The thought that one of our children or grandchildren could be in that situation and that someone would step up and help is a lot of the reason we do what we do. This baby personified our mission."

Tiffany said when she found out about VFW's role in getting her family home, she simply couldn't believe it. "I was literally in tears," she said.

"It was the biggest blessing after everything we had been through. For months, it had been nothing but bad news. It was a wonderful end to the hospital journey. And Jude was a little champion."

Spera said Post 144 sold its physical building years ago and invested the money. The result is the Post has been able to donate more than \$50,000 to various causes each year, including the Fisher House of Boston.

Jen DeLuca, executive director of Fisher House of Boston, said the Deens' story is a beautiful one, and she credits the partnership with VFW for the family's happy ending.

"It's an amazing partnership," DeLuca said. "It provides the Fisher House of Boston the comfort of knowing we are working hand-in-hand with an organization that shares our values and works as hard as we do for our military families. We are so grateful."

Fisher House of Boston President Bryan Donohue echoed this sentiment, noting the two groups share the tradition of veteran assistance.

“The Fisher House of Boston is proud to work alongside the Veterans of Foreign Wars,” Donohue said. “We are grateful that at the core of this relationship, there is unwavering pride in serving those who have served our great nation.”

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