# Illinois Post Donates $157,600 for Veterans and Troop Support

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One Illinois Post has stepped up to provide much-needed funds to help hospitalized veterans in its home state, as well as soldiers in Iraq.

In August 2007, Post 3854 in Skokie, Ill., donated $100,000 to DMS Pharmaceuticals Group, sponsors of the Fisher House of Illinois at the Hines VA Medical Center (VAMC) near Chicago.

“The Fisher House project came to our attention this past year and was of immediate interest to our membership,” said Robert Oberwetter, Post senior vice commander.

Fisher Houses are located at major military and VA medical centers. These homes enable family members to be close to their loved ones during hospitalization. The Fisher House program provides free temporary housing to more than 10,000 families each year.

“We are grateful and appreciative for the leadership donation from members of VFW Post 3854 and its Ladies Auxiliary,” Fisher House Foundation President David A. Coker said. “The 16,800-square-foot, 21-suite Fisher House that will be built at the Hines VA Hospital will serve veterans and their families, so it is fitting that Illinois veterans show their support. We applaud their generosity.”

Post 3854’s fundraising for the donation didn’t come all at once, but culminated after years of steady activity.

“We have a rather unusual situation at our Post in that we haven’t been running specific fundraisers to provide these contributions,” Oberwetter said. “Most certainly, the funds have come from years of hard work by our comrades and auxiliary members from fish fries and other activities, and we are now enjoying the fruits of our labors.”

The Post donated an additional $27,600 to the Spinal Cord Injury and Disorders (SCI/D) Center at Hines VAMC. The money will be used to furnish four patient rooms and two family waiting rooms in the 58,000-square-foot facility, which opened in 2005.

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"The new Hines Spinal Cord Injury unit was looking for the furnishing of some of rooms," Oberwetter said. "Again our members responded."

The SCI/D Center provides specialty care to veterans from eight states. The program provides rehabilitation services for paraplegic and quadriplegic veterans, as well as care of ventilator-dependent spinal cord disorders. Outpatient services include psychology, telemedicine consultations and follow-up.

**Dogs in War Zones Relieve Stress**

Later in the year, Post 3854 found another cause worth of its generosity. When Post members heard about the America's VetDogs program in a Chicago Tribune newspaper feature article, members got involved right away. The Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind in Smithtown, N.Y., trained two dogs to be sent to troops overseas.

"The total cost to breed and train one of these dogs is $30,000," Oberwetter said. "We were fortunate to sponsor one of two black Labradors that were trained to go to Iraq to the 85th Medical Battalion in December 2007."

The two specially trained dogs interact with service members in war zones. These dogs are reported to be the first dogs to be used in a combat zone for therapeutic purposes, as they are intended to relieve stress.

"I felt more relaxed after being able to spend some time with [the dog]," said Sgt. 1st Class Brenda Rich, 1st BCT, 101st Abn. Div. (Air Assault) Medical Operations, told Camp Victory public affairs. "For a few minutes it was just me and the dog and nothing in this environment seemed to matter."

Post 3854 was chartered in 1943 and still has a handful of members from those days, Oberwetter says. Even after 65 years, members are still actively assisting fellow veterans at home and overseas.

*(Story courtesy of VFW Magazine)*