

A Culture of Giving

An Interview with Winston C. Fisher,
Partner, Fisher Brothers, and Executive Vice Chairman, Fisher House Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Winston C. Fisher serves as Partner at Fisher Brothers, heading up finance, acquisitions, and new development opportunities for the real estate investment company. He has been involved with numerous transactions, leading financial analysis and due diligence efforts while working with lenders to secure acquisition and construction loan financing. Fisher sits on the Board of Modern Financial Inc. He represented Fisher Brothers during the completion of the SEC World Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and Station Place Building 3 development, and is currently leading the ongoing efforts of a 25 million square-foot mixed-use urban community overlooking the Las Vegas Strip. Fisher is also actively involved in Fisher Brothers new platform to work with banks, hedge funds, private equity and special servicers to provide development and asset management services for distressed real estate projects. He manages Fisher Brothers day-to-day stock and investment portfolio, including asset allocation, risk management, and third-party manager selection.



Winston C. Fisher

In addition to his work activities, Winston Fisher finds time to be active in numerous philanthropic activities. Fisher is the Executive Vice Chairman of the Fisher House Foundation, a national not-for-profit established to support and house injured Armed Services veterans and their families; he is on the board of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, and is Chairman of the Finance Committee, as well as serving as Chairman of the Intrepid Relief Fund. He is on the Board of Trustees at Syracuse University, and serves on the Facilities and Academic Affairs Committees. He is also on the Board of Visitors for Syracuse University's College of Arts and Science and is on the board of the Realty Foundation of New York.

COMPANY BRIEF Fisher Brothers was founded in 1915 by Martin Fisher, who was joined by brothers Larry and Zachary Fisher. Over the next several decades, Fisher Brothers built residential properties in Brooklyn, Queens, Long Island, Riverdale, Mount Vernon, and later Manhattan. Fisher Brothers began building commercial buildings in the mid-'50s. Midtown tower construction and ownership came to exceed eight million square feet of Class A office space. Fisher Brothers rewrote its business plan in the mid-'70s, adopting a new strategy that called for selling off

its residential properties, continuing to develop and manage commercial real estate investments, and diversifying its investment portfolio into non-real estate sectors. With the decision to capitalize on the firm's capabilities as a builder and manager, the partnership formed Plaza Construction Company in 1986 and Sandhurst Associates in 1992 to provide on-site management for other building owners. Fisher Brothers has emerged as a highly diversified financial investment force. Assets currently under management exceed \$4 billion,

with a substantial portion strategically invested in a broad spectrum of financial markets and ventures, including opportunistic overnight investments in treasuries and repos, as well as building re-financings and construction loans. Today, the firm is led by partners Arnold, Kenneth, Steven, and Winston Fisher. Each assumes primary responsibility for a different aspect of the business. Together they preside over an organization vastly more complex, sophisticated, and far-reaching than the one they inherited.

Are you surprised by how deep the economic crisis has been?

Yes. While it has been avoided, we were as close to another Great Depression as we've ever been. Over-leverage is great when times are good, but it also creates exponential problems when times are bad. We were very concerned about the leverage being added to the market, and believed that when banks reduced their borrowing capacity in the real estate and leverage buy-out markets, it was going to create a lot of problems. The inter-connectivity of the world today is what caused it to become bigger than we even realized.

Throughout the history of the company, philanthropy has been a part of the culture. Where did that begin?

We grew up with it at the kitchen table. Every family member is extraordinarily active in charities, even outside of our family initiatives, like the Intrepid and Fisher House Foundation. It's important to give back; everybody in my family feels that way.

Would you give an overview of the focus and mission for Fisher Houses?

Fisher Houses are homes-away-from-home for families of injured service men and women. Each home is either located on a military base next to the hospital facility or at a VA hospital.

We have 44 homes either built or under construction with plans to have another 15 under construction or have ground broken within the next 6 to 8 months. Unfortunately, the demand is very strong. This all started when Zachary Fisher became aware of a family sleeping in a car because they could not afford to stay in a hotel. He felt that it was unacceptable that somebody who served our country and was injured would not have a place for their family to stay for a reasonable price. So we have become part of the fabric of the military's medical services.

Zachary Fisher also brought the aircraft carrier Intrepid to New York. Do you think he knew early on all that the Intrepid would become?

He had a deep admiration and respect for the military. He brought the Intrepid to New York as a way to honor and celebrate the men and women of the armed services. He believed that the creation of the museum would become a part of the fabric of New York City. He also knew there was a demand for more than one Fisher House, and this was the seed of something that could be bigger. I think he'd be extraordinarily happy and proud of how his legacy has continued with these programs, and where it has moved onto other things, such as the Fallen Heroes Fund.

Can you give an overview of the Fallen Heroes Fund?

The Fallen Heroes Fund started at the beginning of the Iraq/Afghan conflict. Unfortunately, many men and women in the armed services are typically from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The Fallen Heroes Fund initially gave \$10,000 to every family plus an additional \$5,000 per child to help with education. We actively worked with Congress to increase the benefits to people who are killed as a result of service.

As a result of a change in the law, Congress amended death benefits to \$250,000 per family. The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund recognized there was still work to be done. We discovered that many of the people – especially coming back from Iraq/Afghanistan – were suffering catastrophic injuries. The Fallen Heroes Fund built a truly world-class state-of-the-art center for amputees, along with two Fisher Houses in San Antonio, Texas. The benefit will not just be for the men and women in the military, but ultimately, it's going to extend to everybody because of the research that can be done there. We're also now building a traumatic brain injury center in Washington, D.C. ●