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Alder Foods CEO offers free housing for GI families

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Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, devastating as they have been, have bolstered the bottom line for local military contractors over the past decade, and **Alder Foods** is among them.

Still, the wartime growth of this Walpole-based company is not what's most remarkable. It's the passion of CEO **Michelle Keating** to complete a 20-suite home in West Roxbury that will provide free housing for military families whose loved ones are injured in combat and flown back to the United States for extensive medical care at the nearby **Veterans Affairs** hospital.

Keating is leading the charge to raise \$3 million for the completion of **Fisher House Boston**, which broke ground last fall with a total expected price tag of \$6 million. Alder Foods is what Keating does, but this project is what she loves.

"I have taken it seriously to find ways to give back," Keating said.

For those who argue that military contractors have a duty to support charities that help troops and veterans, Keating readily agrees. "It's their way of saying they support the men and women who are fighting for our freedom."

Founded 45 years ago by her father, Paul M. Keating Sr., Alder Foods buys provisions directly from major labels — such as **Stonyfield Farms**, **Organic Valley** and **Lactaid** — and sells them to the military. Since 2000, the company has been awarded \$175.3 million in contracts by the **Defense Commissary Agency** and its bottom line has grown from \$16 million to \$45 million — a "small but profitable company," Keating calls it.

Keating has made philanthropy a corporate priority and Alder Foods has donated

Michelle Keating, CEO of Alder Foods, is fundraising to complete free housing in West Roxbury for families of injured military personnel.



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close to \$500,000 over the past nine years to a variety of military-related charitable causes, Keating said. She directs her philanthropic energy these days toward Fisher House Boston, working with a local board of directors.

They have raised \$700,000 for the building, with one of the most substantial donations being a \$100,000 commitment from **Raytheon Co.** The remainder of the money came through a December fundraiser, which raised \$200,000, and a series of smaller donations, Keating said.

Located on the VA medical center property in West Roxbury, Fisher House will be the first of its kind in New England. Completion is slated for mid-2010.

A national nonprofit organization based in Baltimore, Fisher House has built 43 multisuite homes nationwide and, as part of its model, looks to the local community to raise money for half of its construction costs.

Before Fisher House breaks ground on new projects, it reaches an agreement with

a branch of the military — **Army**, **Navy**, **Air Force** or the **Department of Veterans Affairs** — that will assume ongoing funding and manage the site's operation. In the case of Fisher House Boston, Veterans Affairs will take responsibility.

If Fisher House Boston is unable to raise \$3 million for the West Roxbury project, the national Fisher House organization would provide the rest, said **Jim Weiskopf**, Fisher House spokesman.

Public service announcements and fundraisers are planned for the coming months, and Fisher House Boston has sent donation requests to hundreds of companies.

"I've gone to Fisher houses and they're amazing places," Keating said. "There have been thousands and thousands of men and women who come back injured. They're not in the hospital for a week. They're in for a long time."

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