



Fund Provides Hotel Stays For People Coming To City For Medical Treatment

By: NY1 News

NY1 introduces this week's "New Yorkers of the Week," two New Yorkers who started a fund to provide free hotel stays for people coming to the city for hospital treatment:

When Jennifer Haas and her boyfriend Barry Didinsky came to town, they had enough to deal with.

Jennifer needed surgery. But because of the ITM Hospitality Fund, there was one thing they didn't have to worry about.

"They did the work and they got me the room," Didinsky said.

"They" are Jody Merl and Michael Stoler, the forces behind the fund, which provides free hotel rooms for family members of patients who come to the city for critical medical treatment. So when Jennifer came from upstate to New York University Medical Center, ITM helped relieve some of the burden by finding a hotel room for Barry so he could stay close.

"Mentally it's very comforting that you have a place to stay in the city," Didinsky said. "Physically, there's no expended energy. I had enough to worry about. She was on her fifth surgery, we were already nervous. They made my life easier and that made Jen not worry."

The program started with Jody, whose barter company trades advertising for hotel rooms. Two years ago, she had an oversupply of rooms and decided to put them to good use. She contacted Michael, a health-care philanthropist. He reached out to several hospitals and now has eight on board. The hospitals contact them when a patient's family needs a place to stay.

"It's a wonderful situation where we can actually provide a safe haven, a comforting environment that's in close proximity to the medical centers for people who are in need," Merl said.

"This family member might be sleeping on the floor of the hospital — there's there's no need," Stoler said.

"At least here they can come, even if they only get four or five hours of sleep, they have a facility."

Because it lifts the financial burden of paying for a place for family members to stay, the program makes it easier for people to come here for some of the best healthcare available.

“Many, many of our patients have used the service,” said Dr. Michael Stifelman, Haas' doctor. “I have written back about how important this was for them and how it relieved a lot of the stress and anxiety that they had about having surgery. They know it's being taken care of for them and I think it is not only an unique fund, but an important one that allows us to do our work.”

So far, the program has helped more than 200 families, and makes all the difference in the world to people like Haas and Didinsky.

“It gives a sense of security that the program is there if we need it,” Haas said. “If we're in a situation that I'm back in the hospital that he has some place to stay and he's not driving back and forth, because that puts stress on him and that in turn puts stress on me.”

And so, for easing the burden on loved ones, Jody Merl and Michael Stoler are NY1's “New Yorkers of the Week.”

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