

News and stories

City of Beebe installs monument to honor Gold Star Families

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Carol Rolf | [Arkansas Online](#)

BEEBE — It was Feb. 23, 1945, when Marine Corps Cpl. Hershel “Woody” Williams of West Virginia performed “service above and beyond the call of duty” in action against enemy Japanese forces on Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands south of Japan in the Pacific Ocean. He later received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions.

It was Feb. 23, 2018, when Williams, the sole surviving Marine from World War II to wear the Medal of Honor, came to Beebe, Arkansas, to help dedicate the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument honoring families of service men and women killed while serving in the military. Williams founded the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation in 2012 to recognize Gold Star families and their loved ones who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Williams retired as a chief warrant officer after serving 20 years in the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve. He worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs for 33 years as a veterans’ service representative, allowing him to continue serving veterans and their families.

“This is big news for this little community,” said Bubba Beason, co-chairman with Jeff Marshall of the Beebe Committee for the Gold

Star Families Memorial Monument; both are honorary board members of the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation.

Other committee members are Ken Adams, former commander of Beebe Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7769, who is also an honorary board member of the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, and Marshall's wife, Chelsey Marshall, a Gold Star widow whose first husband, Jeff Swindle, lost his life in 2012 during Operation Enduring Freedom.

"This is the first Gold Star Families Memorial Monument to be built in Arkansas, and as we understand it, we are the smallest community in the United States to have one," Beason said.

"Although this monument is located in Beebe, it is dedicated in honor of all Gold Star families, from every city and every war or conflict. Another monument is planned at the state Capitol in Little Rock."

Beason said it rained during the dedication ceremony Feb. 23 and several days before that, but there was never any intention of canceling or postponing the event because of bad weather.

"Woody said he has never postponed a monument dedication because of weather conditions," Beason said. "This is the least we can do for these Gold Star Families, who have sacrificed so much.

"There was standing-room only," Beason said. "We had 50 Gold Star Families in attendance."

Beason said organizers set up tents and installed a temporary plywood floor on the grounds of the Beebe Veterans Park where the monument was erected.

The large black granite monument, which was designed by Williams, weighs 14,000 pounds and features two sides. One side is etched with the words "Gold Star Families Monument, a Tribute to Gold Star Mothers, Fathers, and Relatives who have sacrificed a Loved One for our Freedom." The other side tells a story through

four granite panels, each tailored to the community where the monument is erected. For Beebe, the panels depict Hometown, Honor, Patriot and Sacrifice. A quote by the late President Ronald Reagan is etched on the "sacrifice" panel — "We are forever indebted to those who gave their lives that we might be free."

Beason said the scenes on each of the four panels "make this unique to Beebe."

At the center of the monument is a cutout figure that represents the "loved one" who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the name of freedom.