

News and stories

Local group hopes to attract Gold Star Families monument to town

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Connecticut families who have sacrificed a loved one for America's freedom may soon have a monument dedicated to them.

Local proponents of veterans and fallen heroes have begun a campaign to build a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument. They are working with the Kentucky-based Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, a national non-profit that provides monument specifications and support to those starting these projects.

"When we found out nobody had even applied to do one in Connecticut, Marianne and I said we have to jump on this," said Gary Roy, who is leading the effort. "Their goal is to put one in every state and we don't have one yet."

"I think it's an important thing to do," Roy pointed out. "It just adds another location these families can go to have a nice, peaceful time to sit and reflect on what their loved one meant and the loss to their family."

Roy is chairing the committee planning the project. Volunteers have yet to choose a location for the new monument, but are narrowing

their search.

The “Gold Star” tradition began after World War II, when families who lost a loved one in service would put a gold star in the window of their home.

There are smaller memorials dedicated to Gold Star families in the Nutmeg State, according to Roy, who does not intend to diminish the others’ value with his project.

“I think it’s going to give people an opportunity to have another place to go,” he explained.

Also working on the plans is 93-year-old Vinnie Thomas, a survivor of the World War II battle of Iwo Jima. He returned from the war in one piece, but some of his comrades weren’t so lucky.

“We survivors are really for it because we want to honor the Gold Star mothers,” Thomas said.

“No mother likes to lose their son. People give you their condolences, say they’re sorry and they mean well, but the pain is always there. It never goes away.”

The monument would be approximately 15 feet high and 6 feet across, made of black granite. Engraved on it would be words and images memorializing fallen heroes and paying tribute to their families.

There are currently 40 of these monuments across the U.S.

“We’re on pace to have about 100 projects on the way by the end of this year,” said Chad Graham, president and CEO of the Medal of Honor Foundation.

Hershel “Woody” Williams, now 94 years old, is his grandfather. Williams fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima with the 21st Marines, 3rd Marine Division, and is the sole surviving Marine from WWII to wear the Medal of Honor.

He and his grandson joined a group in Ohio just this week that was dedicating a newly erected monument there. When Connecticut's is built, they plan to come for the dedication ceremony as well.

"After it's built, hopefully it shows those families their community supports them," Graham said. "That they honor and recognize the sacrifice of their fallen heroes and the sacrifice that family has made. Their loss goes beyond that direct event. There is an empty chair at birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving...every day."

The newly formed committee will have a booth at the Berlin Fair, Sept. 14-16. They will be asking for donations and recruiting project volunteers.

The monument is estimated to cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000. The goal is to have it completed within one year.