

News and stories

Gold Star Monument, Prayer Garden get dedication

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Maggie Fraser | [Weatherford Democrat](#)

Veterans and their families, community leaders, lawmakers and others filled Weatherford's Soldier Spring Park for the dedication of Parker County's Gold Star Monument and Prayer Garden Friday.

Kaye Jordan, Gold Star mother and president of Parker County Gold Star Families, said she hoped the garden would be a peaceful, reflective place for military families and the general public.

"We want our park to mean something special to this community," she said. "Our park is for everyone. If you've lost a loved one, please come to our park. Especially if you've lost a child.

"I promise you'll find some healing here."

Jordan's son, Army PFC Austin G. Staggs, was assigned to First Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, Fourth Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) when he arrived at Fort Campbell, Kentucky in February 2010.

Staggs deployed to Afghanistan on Aug. 25 and was killed in action on Nov. 29.

Following her son's death, Jordan dedicated herself to honoring his

service and memory, and joined with five other grieving military families in Parker County to create the local Gold Star chapter.

Ninety-four-year-old Hershel “Woody” Williams, the only living Medal of Honor recipient who served in the Pacific theater of World War II, gave a speech on the importance of remembering the sacrifices of fallen soldiers.

“History is coming into existence in this community today,” he said. “And it will affect the lives of untold Americans who will follow in our footsteps.

“Perhaps for the very first time, it honors those who made a sacrifice greater than any of ourselves. Our hearts tell us that this memorial will be a lasting tribute and honor to their sacrifice, and makes some assurance their sacrifices will not be forgotten.”

Weatherford Mayor Craig Swancy said the city was proud to have partnered with the Gold Star families to create the memorial garden.

“It’s a shame that in Weatherford’s existence, we’ve never done anything like this until now,” he said. “I thank you, Gold Star families.”

Mike Vitti, a decorated Army combat veteran and co-founder of the Legacies Alive nonprofit that helped create the memorial, said he first came to Weatherford when he walked cross country to visit Gold Star families.

“That trek took me through their hometowns, and to the people who knew them best,” he said. “My goal was to honor them and to let them know, as a combat veteran, how fortunate I was to benefit from their sacrifice.

“These families are the ones who are footing the bill. Not us, as combat veterans. We knew what we were getting ourselves into. They didn’t necessarily have a vote.”

Soldier Spring Park is located at 100 Thrush St. in Weatherford. For more information, www.ci.weatherford.tx.us/467/Soldier-Spring-Park.

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