

News and stories

Kingsport honors Gold Star Families

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Matthew Lane | [TimesNews](#)

KINGSPORT — Gold Star Family members sat on a raised platform in the middle of J. Fred Johnson Park on Monday afternoon. They were surrounded by several hundred veterans and civilians, some in uniform, many others in patriotic colors.

These folks were sat above and apart from everyone else for a reason. It was a show of respect for the loss they have endured.

Gold Star Families are the relatives of a member of the U.S. military who died in battle. On Monday, Kingsport honored those families by unveiling its Gold Star Families monument at the Kingsport Veterans Memorial.

“I want to thank this task force who moved rapidly and we got the job done. You should be proud,” said Ernie Rumsby, president of the Tri-Cities Military Affairs Council.

The monument stands roughly 6 feet tall with four granite monoliths on a rock platform and a saluting soldier carved out. On one side are images, including ones of Bays Mountain and Iwo Jima, that are meant to represent our home, our volunteer spirit, the sacrifice of Gold Star Families and the service of men and women in our armed forces.

Hershel “Woody” Williams, one of only five living Medal of Honor recipients from World War II and the last from the Battle of Iwo Jima, challenged the Model City last fall to establish a Gold Star Families monument in town.

That didn’t take long — \$70,000 was soon raised and the monument became a reality.

On Monday, the 94-year-old Williams returned to Kingsport and thanked the community for its support.

“We really don't have to tell you what this is all about. You know and particularly those folks sitting up there on that stand, they all know,” Williams said. “We all owe them tremendous gratitude and thanks. It is rather unusual how these miracles come about.”

Kingsport is the second city in Tennessee and one of a handful across the country that honors the fallen and their relatives with a Gold Star Families memorial monument. According to the Hershel “Woody” Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, 21 such memorials have been dedicated, and another 50 are in progress.