

News and stories

Monument honoring Gold Star families dedicated during rainy Sunday ceremony

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The moment two Nebraska National Guard members pulled the curtain off the new monument Sunday the rain came.

But almost no one in the crowd at Antelope Park moved. They stood gathered for the dedication of the Nebraska Gold Star Families Memorial Monument.

The drenched crowd of over 100 people remained still as a wreath was placed in front of the monument and U.S. Army Spc. Angie Schroder stoically sang "I'm Proud to be an American."

It was still raining when the American Legion Honor Team fired off a three-shot volley salute as a bugler played "Taps."

Only when the dedication concluded did the clouds clear, the sun return, and the crowd file out.

The heavy rain came at the conclusion of a solemn dedication ceremony on Gold Star Mother's Day Sunday afternoon, at which Gov. Pete Ricketts, Mayor Chris Beulter and other dignitaries spoke.

The newly-dedicated black granite monument, which stands outside the Veterans Memorial Garden, honors Gold Star families — those who have lost loved ones in the U.S. Armed Forces — since Nebraska became a state 150 years ago.

Pat Mracek, whose son Cory Mracek died in 2004 while serving in Iraq, said the monument "will forever be a reminder" of the sacrifice Nebraska families have made after losing a loved one in war.

"People have said that your loved is the one who gave the sacrifice," said Mracek, president of Nebraska Gold Star Mothers. "While that is true, we have given a big part of our hearts and our lives; our family dynamic has changed forever."

Hershel "Woody" Williams, the last living Medal of Honor recipient to serve in Iwo Jima during World War II, also spoke at the dedication.

The Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation helps fund Gold Star family memorial monuments around the country, with the goal of having one in each state.

Nebraska's monument is the 23rd to be dedicated, coinciding with the state's 150th birthday this year.

"Few of us can understand the effects that the loss of a loved one ... in the armed forces can have on a family," Williams said. "For them, the loss of a mother or father, a son or daughter or relative that they're close to is a life-changing experience because it continues to affect them every day of their lives."

The Lincoln Community Foundation and other donors also provided funding.

The monument is split into three stones, featuring a cutout silhouette of a saluting serviceman.

On the south side, the three stones depict the State Capitol, a family

reuniting after a tour of duty and American volunteers in the military.

The north side of the monument is faced with gold lettering, honoring Gold Star families.

Pat Mracek praised Williams for starting the campaign to erect similar Gold Star family monuments around the country.

"He has a heart of gold," Mracek said.