

# News and stories

## Ground broken for Maine Gold Star Families Memorial Monument

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Jon Bolduc | [Sun Journal](#)

LEWISTON — Seven golden shovels stood upright in a mound of dirt Sunday afternoon at Veterans Memorial Park.

As a crowd of about 80 watched, Gold Star parents, veterans and politicians shoveled dirt, breaking ground for the planned Maine Gold Star Families Memorial Monument.

Gold Star flags symbolize a family member who died serving in the military. According to information at [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil), Blue Star flags were flown by families during World War I to indicate actively serving family members. If a family member was killed, the blue star changed to gold.

Lt. Col. Adria O. Horn, former director of Maine Bureau of Veteran Services, said Gold Star families have a visceral understanding of the symbol's meaning.

"My third deployment was in Afghanistan. I'm an only child, and my mom was at home, watching the news." Horn told the crowd. "One morning, a police officer drove up in front of the house and didn't get out."

Horn said that after 10 minutes, the police officer still did not move. Horn's mother, fearing the worst, flew out of the house in her night gown, rapping on the officer's window.

She asked the officer: "Do you see that Blue Star flag? Why on Earth, out of all the places you could park, would you park in front of a house with a Blue Star to drink your coffee?"

"Every family who has a Blue Star flag to show prays every day that it doesn't become a gold one," Horn said.

"A blue star is for those who are with us and serving," she said. "The gold star is a very somber symbol. Nobody wants the blue star to turn gold."

Horn said the need to recognize Gold Star families with a monument is long overdue.

"Gold Star families don't have their own memorial in Maine," she said.

Hershel "Woody" Williams, 95, received the Medal of Honor for valor during the World War II Battle of Iwo Jima. In 2010, Hershel founded the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation.

The foundation's Gold Star Families Memorial Monument project aims to build Gold Star family monuments in each state. Since 2010, the foundation has dedicated 43 monuments in 39 states, with 44 monuments in planning stages.

Williams, the fourth-oldest living Medal of Honor recipient, said that he joined the Marines for the fashion. Williams grew up on a farm in West Virginia. When Williams was a teenager, his older brother would hitchhike back home from base over the weekends.

When he saw his brother in his Army uniform, he was so appalled he decided to join the Marines.

When Williams was 17, he approached his mother for permission to

enlist. She said no. When he turned 18, he went to enlist again, only to be rejected due to his height. A few months later, when the height restrictions were lifted, he finally enlisted.

“Just before going into the Marine Corps, I’d already quit my job thinking I could just go in the minute I got there,” Williams told the crowd.

“The Marine Corps had a waiting list. The base at Parris Island couldn’t handle everybody. The waiting list was two months long. During that two months, I needed some income.”

So Williams’ friend got him a job as a cab driver.

In 1943, Williams said the War Department would inform families they’d lost someone in the war by telegram to the Western Union Office.

Western Union would put the message in a telegram sheet, and send it out to a cab company to be delivered. Each telegram was delivered in a distinctive light gray envelope.

As a 19-year-old country boy, I delivered a number of those telegrams,” he said. “The moment they saw that telegraph, the family already knew. That’s a lasting impression in my mind.”

Lisa Dyke of Saco attended the ceremony with her two leather vest-clad dogs Max and Dolly. Dyke and her dogs are part of the Maine Chapter of Rolling Thunder, a motorcycle group made up of veterans and supporters of veterans.

According to its website, Rolling Thunder “educates the public about POW-MIA issues and supports our country’s veterans, past, present and future.”

Dyke said she has been helping veterans for six years.

“My dad was in the Korean War,” Dyle said. “I was never able to serve, so this was my way of giving back.

“To be here and be part of the Gold Star Family Monument means a lot to me — to be able to honor those who have given their lives.”

Many speakers at the ground breaking addressed the pain Gold Star families feel; and the need to remember service members who died.

Dean Barron, a Gold Star father, moderated the ceremony Sunday. He said the monument — dedicated to families who made the ultimate sacrifice — would provide a place for families across the state to gather as they endure the loss of loved ones.

“Let us speak their names every chance we can,” said John Jenkins, former mayor of Lewiston and Auburn. “Although the body has fallen, the spirit rises when we speak their names.”

The monument is set to be completed and dedicated next spring.