

News and stories

Michigan's First Gold Star Family Memorial Monument Being Built this Summer

Von Lozon | [MLive](#)

BAY CITY, MI -- A Bay City nonprofit focused on recognizing and helping veterans has taken on big projects in the past year, including the restoration of the city's oldest park, Battery Park.

Now it's taking on a project that has never been done before in the state of Michigan.

The Bay Veterans Foundation is working to see the state's first Gold Star Family Memorial Monument [installed at Battery Park in Bay City](#). A groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for 3 p.m. Saturday, April 29. The foundation hopes to have the monument completed by Sept. 30.

The Gold Star Family Memorial Monument was introduced by Hershel "Woody" Williams, a former United States Marine who received the Medal of Honor in 1945. Williams founded the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation in 2010 to establish these monuments throughout communities across the country. The foundation is based out of Louisville, Kentucky.

A Gold Star Family member, according to the [foundation's website](#), is a relative of a United States Armed Forces member who lost their life while serving in the United States Military. The purpose of the memorial monument is to help remember the fallen soldiers and the families who have made that ultimate sacrifice for our country.

"We're proud of Bay City and the people of Bay City to have the forethought to be the first in Michigan to honor all of Michigan's Gold Star Families," said Brent Casey, the executive director and co-founder of the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation.

Having the monument built is personal for Keith Markstrom, president of the Bay Veterans Foundation and a Vietnam War veteran.

"In our family, we've had soldiers from the Revolutionary War up until my service in Vietnam," he said. "We were covered in Korea, World War II, the Civil War. It really made me think how decimating war is or the loss of a loved one. That ends that family's life. There is no progeny, no more dreams for those people.

"I just think it's extremely important that we do have monuments of how important life is and how important our freedoms are."

Markstrom is hoping to raise \$100,000 for the entire project. That money goes toward the construction of the monument, the walkway leading to the monument and potentially paying veterans to help build everything.

The Bay Veterans Foundation plans on raising money through direct solicitation and by selling challenge coins, which are small medallion coins that will say "Michigan Gold Star Family Memorial Monument, Dedicated September 30, 2017."

According to Tim Eckstein, the project committee chairman and secretary of the Bay Veterans Foundation, the monument at Battery Park looks identical to other Gold Star Family Memorial Monuments scattered across the country, but it will have a Michigan presence on it. Each of the monument's back panels have a specific theme.

"From left to right, those themes are homeland, family, patriots and sacrifice," Eckstein said. "The local community has discretion in selecting the images that are going to be etched on those panels to best reflect the community values for those four themes."

The Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation initially looked at Lansing to install a Michigan monument, but wasn't able to work it out. Their focus shifted to Bay County after Eckstein pitched Hershel Williams himself on the idea.

Battery Park was "the perfect location" for the monument, Eckstein said.

Eckstein met with American Legion Chaplain Charles Campbell, who used to own a monument company, and determined that, aesthetically, Battery Park worked the best with the balance of shaded trees and the fact that the black granite matched the nearby cannon in the park. It also overlooks the American Legion post and is in front of the library where an American flag flies. And because it's located on Center Avenue, it's has prime visibility.

For now, there are no other plans to build a Gold Star Family Memorial Monument elsewhere in Michigan. Eckstein says that doesn't mean there won't ever be plans to construct another one in the state, though. Markstrom hopes Michigan has more similar monuments in the future.

The first Gold Star Family Memorial Monument was constructed in West Virginia in 2013. Casey, the executive director and co-founder of the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, says the foundation will give the Bay Veterans Foundation a "complete planning and operations guide" so they know exactly how to construct the monument.

"It includes the schematics directly from the architect," he said.

There are now _____ around the United States and 37 more that are planned for construction. By the time those

are completed, 33 states will have at least one memorial.

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