

News and stories

Memorializing their sacrifice

Dec 12, 2017

Lt. Col. Kevin Hynes | [DVIDS](#)

The families of fallen service members have shed too many tears to count.

So, it seems only fitting that, just as the white covering was pulled to unveil the new Gold Star Family Memorial in Lincoln's Antelope Park, a sudden cloudburst of quarter-sized raindrops drenched the assembled crowd of Gold Star families, Nebraska service members, governmental leaders and others.

In a way, the rainstorm seemed to symbolize all of those fallen tears, as if the heavens themselves were joining in mourning the loss of those Nebraskans who had given their lives in service to the United States as members of the U.S. military.

According to Pat Mracek, whose son, Cory, died in 2004 while serving in the Army in Iraq, the Sept. 24 dedication of the Gold Star Family Memorial monument will serve as an enduring reminder of the sacrifices made by Nebraska's fallen service members and their families.

"People have said that your loved one is the one who gave the sacrifice," said Mracek, who now serves as president of Nebraska

Gold Star Mothers. "While that is true, we have given a big part of our heart and our lives. Our family dynamic has changed forever."

"There are no more birthdays or family celebrations with our loved one," she said. "My son, Sgt. Cory R. Mracek, was killed on Jan. 27, 2004, in Iskandariyah, Iraq. He will be forever 26 years old. On March 16th this year, he would've turned 40. It is so very hard to imagine my son being middle-aged, especially since I have not shared a birthday with him in 13 years. It is hard to visualize what his life might've been like."

The new Gold Star Family Memorial, which was dedicated on National Gold Star Families and Mothers Day, is the first of its kind to be dedicated in the state. It follows similar memorials that have already been erected at 22 other locations nationwide.

The memorial was funded, in part, by the Herschel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, which is seeking to have a memorial honoring Gold Star families placed in every state. Williams, the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient to serve during the bloody World War II battle of Iwo Jima, said the memorials serve an extremely important purpose of helping the American public better understand the lasting sacrifices service members and their families have made on behalf of the nation.

"The period of time and the cause of sacrifice does not change. The loss of loved ones brings the same grief, the same heartache and requires us to remember," the World War II Marine Corps veteran said during the dedication ceremony. "This memorial, here beside me, pays tribute to those families and those relatives of every relationship to that individual. And we pray that in some way it may soothe the pain and will serve as a reminder of their sacrifices. And give some assurance that this community does remember and that those loved ones will not be forgotten."

The new memorial consists of three black granite stones featuring the cutout silhouette of a saluting American service member. It also features symbols entitled "Homeland," "Family," "Patriot," and "Sacrifice."

The symbols are designed to show both the fallen service members' love of country as well as the void created by their sacrifice. The memorial honors all of those families who have lost a service member since Nebraska was founded 150 years earlier.

Williams said the memorial will help the public better understand what that sacrifice means, particularly those most directly affected by it.