

News and stories

Ship christened for Hershel 'Woody' Williams

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COOLVILLE — *"It was a monumental occasion."*

Bryan Casey of Coolville was describing the U.S. Navy christening the USNS Hershel "Woody" Williams (ESB-4) during a ceremony in San Diego on Oct. 21.

Casey, Williams' grandson, was one of several local residents who attended the ship's christening in California. Family members participated in the ship's christening.

Williams, 94, of Ona, W.Va., is the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient from the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II. Williams, a retired U.S. Marine, was in attendance as the Navy christened its second Expeditionary Sea Base ship.

The christening came two years after the announcement was made the Navy would name a ship after Williams, said Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who attended the event.

A petition drive was started about 20 years ago to have a ship named for Williams, said Casey. Over 100,000 signatures were secured for the petition.

“ ,” Casey said of the ship’s christening.

The 784-foot-long ship will serve as a flexible platform to support air mine countermeasures, counter-piracy operations, maritime security and humanitarian missions, according to the ship’s builder General Dynamics NASSCO. The ship will have accommodations for up to 250 personnel, a 52,000-square-foot flight deck, fuel and equipment storage, and will support MH-53 and MH-60 helicopters.

The ship is expected to be delivered to the U.S. Navy in February.

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After the christening, Manchin toured the USNS Hershel “ ” Williams T-ESB4.

Manchin sent a letter to U.S. Navy Secretary Ray Mabus recommending that a Navy ship be named after Williams for his outstanding sacrifice and dedication to the nation, the senator said.

At the ship christening, Manchin presented Williams and his family with a Congressional Record Statement commemorating the christening of the USNS Hershel “ ” Williams.

Williams also attended the groundbreaking of the Gold Star Families Monument at Lookout Park in Marietta on Oct. 10. Money

is being raised to build the monument.

A Gold Star Families Monument has been built in Vienna.

Williams developed the idea for the monuments. Casey is treasurer of the Hershel " " Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, which helps in building the monuments.

These Gold Star Families Monuments across the country honor families who have lost loved ones in the service to their country, Williams said in Marietta.

Twenty-six memorial monuments have been dedicated and 49 others are in the process of being built in 38 states.

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