

News and stories

Groundbreaking brings together a hero, and NH's Gold Star Families

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Bea Lewis | [New Hampshire Union Leader](#)

During poignant ceremonies on Sunday at the New Hampshire State Veterans Cemetery in Boscawen, a World War II veteran who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroism at the Battle of Iwo Jima said the families who have sacrificed a loved one to the cause of war stand as a stark reminder that freedom is not free.

Hershel "Woodie" Williams told the hundreds gathered at groundbreaking ceremonies for a Gold Star Families Memorial Monument about his vision of honoring and paying tribute to them, and preserving the memory of the fallen.

Stephanie Ouellette, whose brother, Marine Cpl. Michael Ouellette, 28, was killed March 22, 2009, while supporting combat operations in the Helmand province in southern Afghanistan, is the honorary board member for the Gold Star Families Memorial Project, and has been the inspiration to bring the monument to New Hampshire.

The project's goal is to raise \$60,000 to construct a memorial to honor the families of the fallen of New Hampshire along the memorial brick walkway at the Veterans Cemetery.

It is the final resting place for thousands of Granite Staters who served in the military, including Ouellette's brother, who was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for displaying exceptional valor in combat by leading his Marines in a gun battle, even after suffering a mortal wound.

Another of the project's goals is to raise awareness about what a Gold Star family is and to pay tribute to the state's fallen heroes, loved ones, and their commitment to carry on the legacy of service and sacrifice.

"A Gold Star family member is a wife, husband, mother, father, stepmother stepfather, parent through adoption, foster parents who stand or stood in loco parentis, children, stepchildren, children through adoption, brothers, sisters, half-brothers, half-sisters, aunts, uncles and grandchildren and grandparents of a member of the Armed Forces of the United States that sacrificed their life for our way of life and the American flag under which they served," Ouellette told the audience.

The proposed memorial is the brainchild of Williams, who has spearheaded the construction and dedication of 19 such memorials; another 43 remain in progress nationwide.

During the morning ceremonies, Williams announced that his foundation had partnered with the New Hampshire Gold Star Families Memorial Project and was donating \$5,000 to aid in their fundraising, which has benefited from some in-kind donations of labor and materials.

While Ouellette concedes that it is an ambitious undertaking to raise enough money so that the monument can be dedicated on national Gold Star Mother Day in late September, she expressed confidence that it can be done.

"This is how I deal with my loss — doing stuff like this. It's not just my family, but all of our families," she said.

Williams concluded: "We can't forget, we won't forget, we never will."

He said he hopes to return to New Hampshire for the dedication, "to see what will stand forever on as a memory to the greatest Americans in the world."