

News and stories

\$10,000 gift honors Gold Star families; Arkansas firms pledge aid to build Capitol monument

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Jaime Dunaway | [Arkansas Online](#)

As fundraising continues for a monument to honor Gold Star families on the state Capitol grounds, an Arkansas business has donated \$10,000 toward the project, the state treasurer announced Tuesday.

Comfort Systems USA of Arkansas, an installation and service provider for heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, is also one of several businesses that have pledged \$200,000 in labor and material costs, the monument's co-chairman, Paul Garrett, said during a news conference at the Capitol.

Conway-based Nabholz construction company is also donating some contracting services, said Mike Meadors, executive vice president of pre-construction services.

"We're so appreciative," Treasurer Dennis Milligan said. "These organizations believe having this monument on Capitol grounds will bring visibility to an important sector of our population. To the Gold Star families, it will not be forgotten -- the memory of service your loved ones gave for our country."

Gold Star families are relatives of U.S. military members who died in

battle.

The Little Rock group behind the monument, made up of primarily ex-Marines, hopes to raise \$350,000 to pay for construction costs and fees required by the secretary of state for future maintenance. The desired amount is more than half the funds needed to complete the \$500,000 project, which would be the first Gold Star monument in the country to be placed on any state Capitol grounds.

The fundraiser was launched after the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled in October 2017 that legislator-directed grants from the state's General Improvement Fund were unconstitutional. The project had been set to receive \$90,000 from the fund.

Since the 2017 ruling, the group has received more than \$80,000 in cash donations from various fundraisers, community groups and volunteers, Garrett said. A handmade bayonet was auctioned for \$12,000, and ROTC students at Little Rock's Catholic High School contributed more than \$20,000.

"The people of Arkansas are stepping up to help make this a reality because the people of Arkansas understand and appreciate the sacrifices these Gold Star families make," Garrett said. "We still have a long way to go, but as Marines, we're known to be stubborn. We intend to see this through."

Plans for the monument, which will be built outside the west entrance of the state Capitol in Little Rock, began in 2016, and the group hoped to unveil it this year on Veterans Day. The new goal is to have it completed by Memorial Day next year, but that will depend on the group's fundraising success, Garrett said.

The memorial will be part of a system of monuments honoring Gold Star families through the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation. The foundation, named for a Medal of Honor recipient who fought in the Battle of Iwo Jima, has 21 monuments dedicated in the United States, with 47 more in progress.

"This sets a precedent for other states," said Sharri Briley, a Gold Star wife whose husband, Donovan Briley, was killed in a 1993 raid in Mogadishu, Somalia, that inspired the movie .

"Our loved ones deserve to be known. They are gone, but they will never be forgotten. It's been 25 years, and our family is still so very proud."