

# News and stories

## Gold Star Families monument in Havre de Grace unveiled Sunday

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David Anderson | [The Baltimore Sun](#)

The Gold Star Families Memorial Monument in Havre de Grace was dedicated Sunday afternoon, as more than 500 people gathered at Concord Point, where the Susquehanna River meets the Chesapeake Bay, for the solemn ceremony.

Many of the speakers alluded to the setting and the hallowed ground where the families of men and women who have died defending their country were being remembered.

Sunday's dedication, on Father's Day, came less than a year after the ground was broken for the memorial on Sept. 11, 2017.

"All I can say is, 'Wow,' " Janice Chance, president of the Gold Star Mothers Maryland Chapter, said. "In less than a year, you have made it happen."

The Gold Star designation is for people whose loved ones — spouses, children, siblings, parents — have died while serving in the U.S. armed forces.

Chance's son, Marine Corps Capt. Jesse Melton III, died Sept. 9, 2008, while serving in Afghanistan.

A number of other Gold Star survivors were present for the ceremony, sitting under shade trees as multiple speakers honored them and their loved ones' sacrifice for the nation and for freedom.

"There is a family member connected to every hero that made the ultimate sacrifice," Chance said.

The ceremony included an unveiling of the monument and remarks from Chance, Havre de Grace Mayor Bill Martin, Harford County Executive Barry Glassman, County Councilman Curtis Beulah, Del. Mary Ann Lisanti, Maj. Gen. Randy Taylor, senior commander of Aberdeen Proving Ground, and Hershel "Woody" Williams.

Williams, a native of West Virginia who served in the Marines in the Pacific during World War II, earned the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Iwo Jima in 1945. He is the last surviving Marine who earned the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military honor, during that war.

The nonprofit Hershel Woody Williams Congressional Medal of Honor Education Foundation, Inc. has supported the creation of monuments to Gold Star families nationwide since it was established in 2010, according to the foundation's website. The organization also awards scholarships to children who have lost parents serving in the military.

Williams' foundation supported the development of the Havre de Grace monument, one of two Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments in Maryland; a similar monument was dedicated in Annapolis in November 2016.

"Let me say, right up front, this is not about me this is about them," Williams said, gesturing to the Gold Star survivors to his left. "The reason we're all here is because of them, to pay them a tribute and honor them."

The idea for the monument originated with the Harford County Commission on Veterans Affairs. Johnny Boker, an Army veteran, is

the former chair of the commission. Boker currently leads the committee to build the monument with Craig Reeling, commandant of the Marine Corps League-Department of Maryland.

“We are both United States [military] veterans and proud residents of Havre de Grace,” Boker said.

The City of Havre de Grace provided the land to build the monument, which is near the Concord Point Lighthouse, overlooking the Susquehanna River and accessible via the Havre de Grace Promenade.

It cost \$67,000 to build the monument, benches and a pedestal. More construction will follow, with the installation of lights, concrete walkways to connect the monument to existing sidewalks nearby and bronze plaques for donors, according to Boker.

The City of Havre de Grace and Harford County each contributed \$10,000 for the initial construction. Lisanti, saying it was Father’s Day and her late father and his five brothers served in World War II, presented a \$1,000 personal contribution Sunday to Boker and Reeling for the phases of the memorial to come.

The ceremony also included the presentation of the colors by the Sgt. Audie Murphy Club of Aberdeen Proving Ground. Local children Iris and Sadie Daugherty, Matthew Ringsaker and Nicholas Reeling led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance, and Suzanne S. Chadwick of Havre de Grace sang “America the Beautiful” at the opening and “God Bless America” at the end.

Chadwick said, before singing “God Bless America,” that she is the daughter of Hungarian immigrants who fled their nation for the U.S. in 1956.

She said her parents suffered oppression in Hungary, which was under Communist rule at the time, “oppression that we don’t suffer here in the United States.” She gave credit to members of the military and veterans and their families for maintaining that freedom.

The Rev. Norman Obenshain, pastor of Havre de Grace United Methodist Church, led the invocation and benediction.

Obenshain prayed, during the benediction, that God would “bring us to such a place, to such a place in human affairs that new monuments like this one will no longer be necessary.”

Rachel Porto, 31, of Aberdeen, was among the Gold Star survivors who attended. Her husband, Marine Cpl. Jonathan Porto, was killed in action March 14, 2010, in Helmand Province in Afghanistan.

She learned about his death the next day, the same day their daughter, Ariana Porto, turned two months old. Ariana is now 8 years old and is going into the third grade at Bakerfield Elementary School, Porto said after the ceremony.

Ariana has never met her father, but she has gotten to know him through photos and videos he shot of himself talking, singing and reading to her while Rachel Porto was pregnant.

“He didn’t want her to be scared of him when he came home, so we have those videos,” Porto said.

She said the monument is “very nice.”

“It’s nice to let people know about us,” Porto said, noting she has met people who don’t know what the Gold Star designation means.

“They can associate that term with the loss that we have and all that we have given,” she said.

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