

News and stories

Fundraiser held in Marietta for Gold Star Family Memorial event

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Honoring the families who have lost a family member in service of their country is the focus of a special memorial planned in Marietta.

People came out Sunday to the Lafayette Hotel in downtown Marietta for a fundraising spaghetti dinner to help raise money for the Gold Star Family Memorial being planned for Gold Star Park (formerly Lookout Park) at 801 Lancaster St. in Marietta.

Around 110 people attended the dinner, which was held in the Lafayette Hotel's Gun Room restaurant from 3-7 p.m. Around \$1,200 was raised.

"This fundraiser is to raise as much money as we can," said Bernie Lyons, an honorary member of the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation. "We have to raise over \$50,000."

Just over \$29,000 has already been collected for this project, Lyons said.

"We are not too far away," he said. "We are getting there."

The special memorial is being placed to honor the families who

have lost family members in service to their country and the sacrifices military personnel make in serving their country. In November 2016, one of these monuments was dedicated at Spencer's Landing Park in Vienna.

The memorial project was the idea of Hershel Woodrow "Woody" Williams, a retired United States Marine from West Virginia, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II. Williams has the goal of getting at least one Gold Star Families monument in every state.

The original monument was established in 2013 at the Donel C. Kinnard Memorial State Veterans Cemetery in Dunbar, W.Va. Soon interest developed and more started to be put up.

In talking about the project, Lyons said there was a lot of interest in it from the community.

"The community wants it," he said.

Members of the Sgt. Bob O'Malley Detachment #1436 of the Marine Corps League have been supporting the project with members helping with fundraising and raising awareness in the community.

Those with the project spoke about it before Marietta City Council. City officials got behind the project and picked the location.

"Now it is our job to go out, raise the money, get it put together, engraved and get it put up," Lyons said.

There are currently 32 monuments finished and another 51 projects currently being worked on nationwide, said Bryan Casey, Williams' grandson and Treasurer of the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation that builds the monuments across the country.

A monument takes about \$60,000 to build, said Casey, but they're built to last.

Casey said his grandfather was actually speaking in Parkersburg

when the idea came to do these monuments. Initially he wanted to do something to honor Gold Star mothers, but it was a grieving widower, who lost his son in service in Afghanistan, that showed him how whole families make a sacrifice when their family member is lost in service to this country.

“He told Woody that ‘Dads cry too,’” Casey said.

“It is the whole family that suffers that sacrifice, that suffers that loss,” Casey quoted his grandfather.

Each monument has a place to honor local soldiers who sacrificed for their country. The names of those going on the Marietta memorial were unveiled Sunday.

“The pictures will be guys who served from Marietta and Washington County,” Lyons said.

They include Staff Sgt. Wayne L. Martin of Lower Salem who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was killed on a bombing run over Rumein, Germany, during World War II; Private William M. Taylor of New Matamoras who served in the U.S. Army and was killed near St. Germain, France, in World War II; Specialist Allen D. Nolan of Marietta who served in the U.S. Army and was killed from injuries sustained in Iraq in 2004; Captain Roger B. Dyer of Lowell who served in the U.S. Army Air Corps and was killed over France in June 1943 during World War II; Cpl. Kyle Hockenberry of Newport who served in the U.S. Army during Operation Enduring Freedom and became a triple amputee, losing both legs and his left arm from an improvised explosive device (IED); Lt. Richard N. Christy II of Marietta who served in the U.S. Air Force and was killed on a mission over Cambodia in February 1972; Sgt. Robert “Bob” O’Malley of Marietta, who passed away a few years ago, served in the U.S. Marines and served during World War II in the Pacific Theater of Operations earning the Combat Action Ribbon, two Bronze Stars, the World War II Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the American Campaign Medal; and Lt. Rex “Randy” Douglas of Marietta who served in the U.S. Navy and ejected from a malfunctioning F-14A landing on an aircraft carrier on Feb. 5, 1979,

and was never found.

Hockenberry is still alive and is on the monument to show the sacrifices many service members have made in returning from war.

"He lost three limbs and, to me, that is a great sacrifice," Lyons said. "The memorial is to recognize all of the families that have lost someone in war."

The Marietta monument dedication is scheduled for June 23. Williams is expected to attend and speak at the dedication. Also scheduled to speak will be Karen Hernest Kelly, wife of White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly.

For people to donate, they can contact Roy Trembly at 304-966-4419, Bernie Lyons at 304-295-6994 or visit

"Every dollar counts," Lyons said.