

# News and stories

## Gold Star monument planned for families who lost loved ones in military service

Sep 9 2018

Melissa Nelson Gabriel | [Pensacola News Journal](#)

Ashley Lukasiewicz envisions a place where her children, ages 3 and 5, can reflect on the sacrifices they have made for their country.

The kids are young, but they know their father, a Marine pilot, died helping others. They are growing up without him because of his dangerous 2015 mission, which saved many lives.

Suzi Fernandez would like a quiet place where she can connect with other parents whose sons and daughters died while fighting with the U.S. military in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The local woman recently joined forces with others who have lost loved ones while they were serving in the U.S. military. The group hopes to bring a monument to Gold Star families to Pensacola.

"We are part of a club and it's a club that you don't want to be in," said Fernandez.

Her son, Air Force Staff Sgt. Forest Sibley, was killed in Afghanistan in 2015 when the team he was with was gunned down at a vehicle checkpoint by men wearing Afghan National Defense and Security Forces uniforms.

Lukasiewicz's husband, Marine Capt. Dustin Lukasiewicz, was killed during a 2015 humanitarian mission following an earthquake in Nepal.

The two women have forged a bond through their work to bring the Gold Star family memorial to Pensacola. They want the community to know more about the loved ones they lost and the sacrifices made by the families of those who serve.

"I think this monument is something that almost puts a face to the names. These people were real and they left behind real families. We are real people and we were left behind," Lukasiewicz said.

Also working with the group is Edward Spears, uncle of Marine Lance Cpl. Johnathan R. Spears of Molino. Spears was shot and killed in 2005 during fighting in Iraq.

Spears said he likes the project because it is unique to Pensacola while also connecting Pensacola to other communities around the country.

The local project is part of a larger effort by the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation for Gold Star family memorial monuments. The foundation started the project in 2010 and has dedicated 33 monuments so far, with more than a dozen more planned.

"The 14-foot high, 6-foot wide granite monuments include the outline of Williams saluting with the words "Gold Star Families. A tribute to Gold Star families and relatives who sacrificed a loved one for our Freedom."