

News and stories

Gold Star Family memorial groundbreaking set for Friday at Washington Crossing National Cemetery

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Joan Hellyer | [The Intelligencer](#)

It will be the first Gold Star Family memorial installed at a national cemetery in the United States.

Two Medal of Honor war heroes — one from World War II and the other from the Vietnam War — are expected to take part Friday in a ceremonial groundbreaking for a Gold Star Family memorial at [Washington Crossing National Cemetery](#).

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The public is invited to the 3:30 p.m. groundbreaking near the administration building of the cemetery just off Highland and Washington Crossing roads in Upper Makefield, organizers said. They scheduled the ceremony for Friday because the medal winners, Hershel “Woody” Williams and Harvey “Barney” Barnum, along with other veterans, will be in the area for this weekend’s annual Army-Navy football game in Philadelphia.

U.S. Marine Corps veteran John Heenan and his wife, Bernadette, both longtime members of the nonprofit [Guardians of the National Cemetery](#), were the driving force locally to secure the black granite

monument that pays tribute to families whose loved one died during military service. The Heenans worked for almost a year with the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation to get permission from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to erect the memorial on the cemetery's grounds.

"We are damn proud of it," John Heenan said Thursday. "We are able to lend a shoulder and a hand and be supportive to the Gold Star families."

The 94-year-old Williams, who earned a Medal of Honor for his "heroism above and beyond the call of duty during the Battle of Iwo Jima," founded the foundation several years ago to oversee construction of the memorials.

The first monument was erected in 2013. There are now 21 dedicated monuments in place and another 47 in progress at memorial sites across the country.

One side of the memorial pays tribute to the mothers, fathers and relatives who have lost a love one, according to the foundation's website. The other side tells a story with four granite panels labeled "Homeland, Family, Patriot, and Sacrifice." At the center of the tribute is a cut out, which represents the service member who died.

No taxpayer dollars will be used to erect the memorial at the cemetery, John Heenan said. He and his wife secured \$80,000 in private donations to cover the memorial's costs.

"We are just so blessed," said Bernadette Heenan, a former Council Rock school board member. "It is a very emotional thing."