

News and stories

Gold Star Families monument dedicated at Washington Crossing National Cemetery

June 10 2018

Christopher Rubo | [The Intell](#)

The monument honors and pays tribute to Gold Star families whose loved ones died in military service. It's the 36th such monument in the United States, but the first ever in a national cemetery, organizers said.

For Mitchell and Julie Schultz, the emotions are still raw.

Just two months ago, the Huntingdon Valley couple lost their 28-year-old son in a military training accident. Capt. Samuel A. Schultz was one of four Marines killed when their helicopter crashed in Southern California.

"There's grief. There's loss. It's still very new to us," said Mitchell Schultz. "People who haven't experienced it can never understand. I hope they never have to."

Schultz shared his feelings during an interview Saturday at the dedication of the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument at Washington Crossing National Cemetery in Upper Makefield.

The monument honors and pays tribute to Gold Star families — those, like the Schultzes, whose loved ones died in military service.

It's the 36th such monument in the United States, but the first ever in a national cemetery, organizers said.

"It's much more than just chunks of granite. It symbolizes our hug to these families, our prayers for them," said John C. Heenan, a Marine Corps veteran from Ivyland who was instrumental in getting the monument erected. "It shows that Americans care about the sacrifice made by them and their loved one."

Gold Star families attending Saturday's event expressed gratitude for the monument, the effort that went into building it, and the sentiment behind it.

"This memorial reflects our history," said Rhonda Worthington, president of the North Penn Chapter of Gold Star Mothers of America. "It's a place of healing. "It's a place to gather and share — to ponder thoughts not to be shared."

As flags rose and fell gently in the warm breeze above the monument Saturday, some Gold Star family members were teary-eyed and reflective.

"I'll look at the monument and I'll remember the good times — I'll remember my son," said Hilda Balot-Ennis. The Philadelphia woman's son, Lt. Cmdr. Louis Balot, formerly of Warminster, died while in the Navy, shortly before his retirement after 30 years of service. "He was an officer and a gentleman. I'm the proudest mom you could ever find."

John and Bernadette Heenan, two longtime members of the nonprofit Guardians of the Cemetery, spent much of the past year working with the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation to secure federal permission to build the monument at the 205-acre cemetery off Highland and Washington Crossing roads.

Williams, a World War II Marine Corps veteran and Medal of Honor recipient who fought at the Battle of Iwo Jima, helped create the foundation. Its key mission includes establishing Gold Star Family

Memorial Monuments in all 50 states.

“These monuments happen because of the people in the community,” Williams said. “It says great things about the communities — about your community.”

The monument is imbued with symbolism. The silhouette of a saluting service member represents a missing or fallen serviceperson who made the ultimate sacrifice for the United States.

A panel with the word “FAMILY” inscribed upon it shows Molly Pitcher, who bravely joined the combat when her soldier husband was seriously wounded in battle during the Revolutionary War. Another panel reading “SACRIFICE” shows the flag raising on Iwo Jima — a reminder that victories in war are achieved only after great sacrifice.

The “HOMELAND” panel depicts Bowman’s Tower, built as a monument in Washington Crossing Historic Park to Revolutionary War soldiers who operated in the area. Meanwhile, the “PATRIOT” panel shows George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge — a reminder of the “need for and power of prayer,” a description said.

During a masterful speech, Williams spoke in a soft, soothing voice, sharing stories of military families’ sacrifices. At times, he directly addressed Gold Star families, causing emotions to rise. And, of course, he had poignant words for the military members who never came home, saying their sacrifice is the foundation upon which the freedoms and privileges of the United States are built.

“They must never be forgotten,” said Williams.

SHARE THIS PAGE!