

Port St. Lucie adding Gold Star family memorial to park

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The ultimate sacrifice for freedom may not be dying, but losing a parent or child. Our nation recognizes that loss by the Gold Star. It's a recognition no one with a family member in the military wants to receive.

"It's everybody's worst nightmare," Gold Star mother Karen Zook said.

Efforts are underway to memorialize the sacrifices of family members who've lost children in active military duty at Port St. Lucie's Veterans Memorial Park, 2100 S.E. Veterans Memorial Parkway. At a regular City Commission meeting — Oct. 24 — Zook presented plans for a 22-by-6 foot, four-panel granite memorial to go at the park's northern end. She said the funds could be raised and the monument erected in one to two years. She said money and in-kind donations have already started.

"What we need to do now is generate funds for the granite," she told the commission.

Commissioners were united in well-wishes and offers to help raise the funds.

"It's absolutely fitting," Commissioner Shannon Martin said at the meeting. "If there's anything I can do to help you with fundraising, please let me know."

Zook and her husband, Mark Zook, lost their son, Marine Corps corporal Ian Zook, while he was supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004. He's buried at Palm City's Forest Hills Memorial Park.

In a phone interview, Zook said Roy Brewer, vice chairman of United Veterans of St. Lucie County, approached Gold Star families about the monument. He was inspired by Medal of Honor recipient Hershel "Woody" Williams' effort to get Gold Star family monuments built across America through his foundation.

"It's Roy's vision for our area for the Treasure Coast," Zook said. "He asked our permission as Gold Star mothers."

In a separate phone interview, Brewer said he took local Gold Star families to Tampa to see one of five completed Gold Star memorials. The foundation is working with local groups on 19 more stretching from Fall River, Mass., to Hayward, Calif.

"I didn't want to put them in a situation where I was making



Staff photo by Patrick McCallister

Local Gold Star family members promoted efforts to build a Gold Star family memorial at Port St. Lucie's Veterans Memorial Park, at the city's recent Veterans Day Service. The proposed memorial will be 22-by-6 foot in four granite panels. From left to right are Clay Jr., Linda and Clay Shumann, Kathi Sanburg, and Karen and Mark Zook.



Photo courtesy of the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation

Port St. Lucie is one of 19 places in the nation that locals are working with the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation to erect monuments to Gold Star families, those who've lost relatives while they were serving in uniform. The foundation has erected five, including one in Tampa.

demands," Brewer said. "I left it up to them whether they wanted to get involved."

Zook was impressed. "It's kind of amazing that someone would do that," she said. "Roy got together some other amazing men and women in St.

Lucie County. You won't see them, but they're really the backbone of this."

Brewer said members at the Vietnam Veterans of America — Chapter 566, Port St. Lucie — and the Marine Corps League — Jack Ivy Detachment 666, Port

St. Lucie — formed an ad hoc committee to shepherd fundraising and construction of the memorial.

To donate for constructing the memorial, call (772) 209-0570, or visit www.hwwmohfoundation.org/port-st-lucie.html.