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Volunteers make progress on Idaho Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Plaza

By Scott Kraus Idaho State Journal

Oct 12, 2020



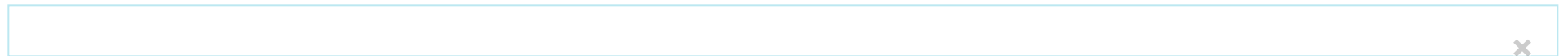
Rebecca Webb, who briefly removed her mask for a photo, stands recently at the site of the Idaho Gold Star Memorial Monument under construction in north Pocatello. She's the chair of the Idaho Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Committee.

Scott Kraus/Idaho State Journal

POCATELLO — Dozens of volunteers recently helped plant trees surrounding the Idaho Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Plaza, bringing the project closer to fruition.

“It was really good; it was a good day,” said Rebecca Webb chairwoman of the Idaho Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Committee.

The POW*MIA organization was there helping out, as were other groups.



The monument is under construction on Gold Star Drive within the planned Northgate development in the city's north side. Webb, of Pocatello, said there is still some planting to be done, because they have close to 235 plants and trees that were donated for the site.

R&D Wholesale Nursery in Idaho Falls donated several items, as did Cloverdale Nursery in Boise. And Brady's Plant Ranch in Downey helped with the landscaping, while Changing Seasons Nursery and Landscape in Pocatello also donated, Webb said.

Starr Corp. is overseeing construction of the Memorial Monument.

Webb's desire to erect the monument was sparked by a tragedy.

In June 2017, the family lost their son, Chris, who was a combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Webb said.

“It was the hardest thing I've encountered in my life — losing a child,” she said.

Afterward, she attended the American Gold Star Mothers Convention in Long Beach, California.

While there, she met Medal of Honor recipient Hershel “Woody” Williams, 97.

His organization started the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument project with the vision of having one of the memorial monuments in every state in the nation, Webb said.

So after talking with Woody, she decided to bring the first Gold Star monument to Idaho.

And that led to the Pocatello project where progress continues to be made.

“I would like to thank everybody that turned out to help plant,” Webb said. “I’m very grateful to everybody. It felt very good to see the support that we received.”

Around 15 members of the Idaho National Guard also turned out to pitch in with the planting.

Many of them knew Webb’s son.

“I was proud of the support we received from the National Guard and it meant a lot to me to see them there,” she said.

Webb said the project is a vital endeavor — an honorable endeavor.

“It’s important that we remember and honor those who gave their lives in military service to the nation,” she said.

Webb says that not only does the monument honor military personnel, but it also recognizes the sacrifices made by their families.

“I’m hoping this monument will bring some peace and healing to Gold Star Families, as well as to our service members who lost their buddies in military service,” she said.

Ultimately she hopes the monument site will be a special place where Gold Star Families and veterans can go and know that their family members and friends who lost their lives while actively serving in the U.S. armed forces are not forgotten.

But Webb says she isn't alone in the effort and it wouldn't be possible without the volunteers on the committee for the project.

The committee members work hard and have selflessly given of their time, she said.

"I'm grateful to each and every one of them and I'm actually in awe at the overwhelming support we've received in this project," she said. "We have a lot of good people out there in the world, and I've been blessed by meeting so many of them."

Webb has also started a chapter of American Gold Star Mothers Inc. The members have all lost a son or daughter serving in the U.S. military. The chapter received its charter in spring 2019.

"We'll be looking for opportunities to help our veterans and support Gold Star Families in the state," Webb said.

In fact, the Star Garnet Chapter of the organization plans to work on securing more donations to accomplish its mission as a veterans service organization, she said.

"I know those who are current members of our chapter," she said. "They feel good about it."

Meanwhile, the Gold Star Families Memorial project started a couple years ago in Pocatello.

And it's operating under the umbrella of the Hershel "Woody" Williams Medal of Honor Foundation, Webb said.

About 20 Rotary members also turned out to help plant shrubs and trees at the site, said Rotary Club member Greg Gunter of Pocatello.

The Rotary clubs of Pocatello also sponsored the Gold Star in the center of the memorial plaza.

And the project has received a grant from Rotary District 5400.

Part of the stipulation for the grant was it had to include volunteer on-the-ground labor for Rotary members.

“We got a lot accomplished, with the balance of this fall’s plantings completed,” Gunter said.

And he said it will pay off in the spring when the plants start to flourish and have a growth spurt.

“They were all carefully fertilized and treated with booster when they were planted,” Gunter said.

He says the entire project has been interesting and informative.

“You learn an awful lot about the sacrifices that families make by being in proximity to them as you work on a project like this,” Gunter said.

Webb said that the Idaho Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Committee plans a formal dedication of the monument on May 28. But there’s key work yet to be done.

“We’re still in a fundraising posture to ensure the monument is completely paid for prior to the dedication and can be properly maintained,” she said.

That’s important.

“We want to ensure that it’s kept in a condition that properly honors the service members and families,” Webb said.

There are several ways to donate to the effort:

Make a check payable to “HWWMOHF” and mail it to: P.O. Box 4031 Pocatello, Idaho 83201 Be sure to include “Idaho” on the memo space.

A check payable to the same can be mailed to: Hershel “Woody” Williams Medal of Honor Foundation 12123 Shelbyville Road Louisville, KY 40243 Be sure to include “Idaho” on the memo space.

Donate online at the national organization

Or for more information call 208-243-2785.