

HISTORY OF THE BLUE STAR MEMORIALS

At the close of World War II, National Garden Clubs (called National Council of Garden Clubs at the time), like other public-spirited groups, was seeking a suitable means of honoring our service men and women. Garden Club members visualized a living memorial, preferring to help beautify and preserve the country for which these men and women had fought, rather than build stone monuments in their honor.

In 1944, Mrs. Lewis M. Hull, Garden Club of New Jersey President and future NCSGC President, and Mrs. Vance Hood, Roadside Chairman, had an inspired idea: one thousand flowering dogwood trees would be planted along five miles of highway, which had been designated the Blue Star Drive by the Legislature. No billboards were to be allowed on the memorial stretch. The project was named for the blue star in the service flag, which hung in windows of homes and businesses to honor service men and women.

The guest speaker at the 1945 National Council of State Garden Clubs Annual Meeting in New York City was Spencer Miller, New Jersey's State Highway Commissioner, who had helped to implement the New Jersey project. He proposed that the program be adopted by NCSGC. At the 1945 Fall Semi-Annual Meeting, the project was approved. A "ribbon of living memorial plantings traversing every state" called The Blue Star Memorial Highway Program was adopted at the 1946 Annual Meeting in New Orleans.

In 1947, Mrs. Frederick R. Kellogg (NCSGC President 1930–1933) designed a marker, which would identify the highways. Clubs responded enthusiastically, with Rhode Island receiving the first endorsement. After official approval of the site, garden clubs would purchase markers and planting materials. Highway Departments would plant and maintain the area. This was the first program undertaken by garden clubs on a national scale.

While it originally began to honor World War II veterans, it enlarged its mission in 1951 to include all men and women who had served, were serving, or would serve in the armed forces of the United States.

The need for an extension of the program to accommodate other than dedicated highways became apparent. As a result, a smaller By-Way Marker, to be placed in areas such as parks, civic, and historical grounds, was approved at the 1981 convention in Atlanta. This marker was changed at the 1994 convention in Connecticut to be more descriptive by including the words "A Tribute to the Armed Forces of America".

A third marker had been added at the 1996 convention in Michigan. This marker was identical to the original Blue Star Memorial Highway Marker, except for the removal of the word "Highway." This change allowed the marker to be placed on grounds of a National Cemetery or Veterans Administration Center. At the 2004 convention in St. Louis the scope of this marker was enlarged to include other appropriate civic locations.

- * *The tribute line on the Blue Star Highway and Memorial markers is a Tribute to the Armed Forces who have defended the United States of America.* This appears on all Blue Star Highway and Memorial Markers.
- * *The tribute line on the Blue Star Memorial By-Way Marker is a Tribute to the Armed Forces of America.* This appears on all Blue Star By-Way Markers.

GOLD STAR MARKERS SUPPORT FAMILIES OF FALLEN HEROES

Gold Star Families is a (501)(c) (3) not for profit organization created to provide support to those who have lost a loved one in service to our country through the United States Armed Forces. All family members representing all conflicts, all branches of service and all circumstances of death are supported. Family members are referred to as *Gold Star, Families of the Fallen* and/or *Survivors*.

Their mission is to offer honor, hope and healing through remembering fallen heroes by coming together for various events. While their hero made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, survivors live daily with the pain of this sacrifice. Gold Star Families endeavor to provide an atmosphere of emotional and psychological conduit for healing. One way in which we accomplish this is by providing memorials for every fallen hero to their surviving family members.

Many people do not know the significance of the Gold Star banner and its meaning. Their organization is committed to educating others on this important symbol and how to respond properly when meeting someone who has lost a loved one in service to our country. The name Gold Star came from the custom of families of service members hanging a banner called a service flag in the window of their homes. The service flag had a star for each family member in the United States Armed Forces. Living servicemen were represented by a Blue Star, and those who had lost their lives were represented by a Gold Star.

Gold Star Families believe in giving back to their families. An annual scholarship is given to a Gold Star Family each year. Additionally, a vegetable garden is grown, from which all the produce is donated to local veterans and their families.

- * The tribute line on the Gold Star Families Memorial Marker is a *Tribute to Gold Star Families who's loved one paid the ultimate price defending the United States of America.*
- * The tribute line on the Gold Star Families Memorial By-Way Marker is a *Tribute to All Gold Star Families- Honor-Hope-Healing.*
- * Gold Star Families Code- HONOR – HOPE - HEALING