

# News and stories

## Proposed Gold Star Memorial at Veterans Memorial Park

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Christina Leavenworth | [WEAR TV](#)

PENSACOLA, Fla. (WEAR) — Some big changes are being proposed for the Veterans Memorial Park.

“My husband was a pilot in Marine Corp. I look at all these plaques, my husband isn't alone,” said Ashley Lukasiewicz.

Ashley lost her husband, Marine Captain Dustin Lukasiewicz, in 2015 when his helicopter went down in Nepal. She was 36 weeks pregnant with their son and was raising a nearly 2-year-old daughter.

“When they see a helicopter, my daughter gets confused and wants to know if daddy is going to come back down, they don't understand him being physically gone is permanent,” she said. “It's really hard to put in words, their father is in heaven, it's hard for children to process.”

She's incredibly grateful that his name was added to the Marine Aviation Memorial at Veterans Memorial Park. Now she, along with other Gold Star families, want a special memorial to honor those Gold Star families who have lost so much.

"It would mean everything, it's awesome for Gold Star families, awesome for the community, raising awareness. Let's people know we are real people, not a movie or story, but real people, real sacrifice," she said.

The Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation has put up 33 of these Gold Star family memorials across the country and they hope to add Pensacola to the list now.

The Board of the Veterans Memorial Park Foundation need to vote on it and present it to the city council. Lukasiewicz said they started this project a few months ago and she's been amazed by the amount of Gold Star families that have reached out to her to be a part of it.

"We share similar experiences, similar grief," she said. "These memorials and monuments help the grieving process to see people really do care and their father's sacrifice was not in vain."

If approved, the memorial will be 15 feet wide, 7 feet tall and made of pure granite around \$60,000 will needed to be raised to build it and transport it here. Committee members expect that to take about a year or two.

That's not the only change to the park. A Desert Storm Memorial is also in the works. Half of the money has been raised and they hope to have that up by Memorial Day 2019.