

## ***Recognizing Gold Star Fathers***

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The 2016 presidential campaign unexpectedly brought the words “Gold Star Father” to the forefront. And while more Americans now recognize the term, many still don’t understand what being a “Gold Star Family” member actually means.

### ***History***

In an effort to provide comfort and sympathy to mothers who lost their children to military service and care for hospitalized veterans, Grace Darling Siebold founded American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. after her son was killed in action during World War I. The organization was officially established on June 4, 1928 in Washington, D.C. Decades later, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill allowing the Fathers of Fallen Heroes or previously disabled service members the same benefits shown mothers, ensuring that the sacrifices of Gold Star Fathers are appropriately honored.

A Gold Star Family member is someone who lost a loved one while serving on Active Duty in the Armed Forces of the United States or died as a result of such service. The average age of the Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen who sacrifice their lives for our freedom range from 18 to 25. Unfortunately, many Gold Star Families do not have the resources to honor their loved one. This not only affects the parents of these Fallen Heroes, but also the spouses, children, and siblings who are left behind.

During the 2017 Legislative Session, Georgia State Representative Rhonda M. Burnough (D-Riverdale, District 77) drafted [House Resolution 723](http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20172018/HR/723) (<http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20172018/HR/723>) officially recognizing November 9, 2017 as Gold Star Father Day in Georgia. “No parent should outlive their child. As the daughter of a United States Marine and wife to a Marine and Vietnam Purple Heart Veteran, my wish was that this legislation would provide some level of comfort to fathers who were unintentionally overlooked,” she expressed.

As soon as this Resolution passed, a small staff which included Army Veteran Arthur Hughes, writer/editor Kimberly Allen, and Rep. Burnough immediately got to work organizing the inaugural Georgia Gold Star Father’s Recognition Event. Thanks in part to the efforts of the Survivor Outreach Services Program Team led by Support Coordinator Gladys Portwine, Fathers of Fallen Georgia Heroes were encouraged to attend whether they resided in the state or not.

Over forty Gold Star Fathers and their families gathered at the Georgia State Capitol on November 9, 2017. Thirty Georgia cities and counties were represented and all branches of the Military, with fathers from as far away as Texas in attendance. In total, over 100 attendees came out for Georgia’s first Gold Star Father’s Recognition Event and luncheon, which featured Gold Star Fathers Carey H. Brown, Kerry W. Davis, and Thomas P. Dingler, Jr. as speakers. Military resources related to survivor outreach assistance and benefits were also shared during the event, with many Fathers stating they did not realize some of these services were even available to them.

“The last Sunday in September is observed nationally for Gold Star Mothers, but there is no national observance date for Gold Star Fathers or Gold Star Families. No disrespect intended, but women, mothers in particular, are always celebrated and supported publicly in almost anything they do. Men rarely get the same acknowledgement or lifeline,” clarifies Hughes, a longtime Gold Star Father advocate who is working with State Rep. Burnough to make this a national day of recognition. “It did my heart good to finally see this day come to fruition in Georgia.”

During the 2018 legislative session, [House Resolution 655](#) (<http://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/en-US/Display/20172018/HR/655>) passed in the Georgia House of Representatives. This unanimous bipartisan effort officially named November 9 as Gold Star Father Day annually in Georgia, and will hopefully get passed in the State Senate next. Meanwhile, plans are already underway for this year’s Recognition Event set for Friday, November 9, 2018 at the Capitol.

“The first Recognition Event gave Gold Star Fathers who lost a child in service to our country a space to share their loved ones’ stories and speak out about coping with loss,” explains State Rep. Burnough. “It is my hope that this year’s program will not only provide continued comfort for these fathers but also create a network of support amongst themselves and their families.”

Gold Star designations include the Gold Star Lapel Pin, which is a gold star on a purple circular background that is presented to parents, widows, widowers, and next of kin of United States Armed Forces members killed in combat operations. The Next of Kin Lapel Pin is a gold star on a gold background, presented to the immediate family of United States Armed Forces members who die in service outside of combat theater of operations. The Gold Star Service Flag is displayed in memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

“I want to thank the state of Georgia for recognizing our Gold Star Families, and in particular, our Gold Star Fathers,” Navy Region Southeast Coordinator Rufus Bundrige said. “By highlighting their sacrifice and resiliency, as well as their role in keeping families together, we provide the opportunity to share our deepest respect and gratitude for these men. On behalf of the Navy Region Southeast, thank you to the state representatives and all of our local supporters, but most of all, thank you to our Gold Star Fathers.”

If you or anyone you know would be interested in recognizing Georgia's Gold Star Fathers (whether they currently reside in the state or not), please visit [www.georgiagoldstarfathers.com](http://www.georgiagoldstarfathers.com). Spouses and families are welcome to attend free of charge.