



**GOLD
STAR
MISSION**



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

This quote by Henry Ford helps explain the success of the Gold Star Mission!

The Gold Star Mission started in 2017 around a very basic idea —“to Never Forget”! As word of the mission quickly spread, more people joined in, and they remain today as members of the Gold Star Mission Team!

Through the deliberate work and efforts of so many passionate people, The Gold Star Mission continues to grow and reach higher levels of success!

We hope that this Annual Report recognizes the continued growth and success, that are a result of so many people! This report helps to identify those efforts, contributions and sacrifices! The event participation and volunteering for events, the donations, the support, and most importantly the sacrifices have been tireless, as we continue to honor our Fallen Heroes and their Gold Star Families! Please accept our deepest and sincere appreciation!

The Gold Star Mission remains steadfast!

The Gold Star Mission’s efforts remain focused!

The Gold Star Mission is poised for continued success!

Thank you for being a part of this journey!

Always Remember, Never Forget

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Letter From the President
- 5 What We're About
- 6 Gold Star Family Profile: Jody Trussel
- 8 Activities Report
- 10 GSM Events
- 12 Financial Report
- 15 Our Partnership with ISU
- 18 Sponsors and Donors
- 22 Scholarship Program
- 28 GSM Leadership
- 30 Community Volunteers
- 31 Volunteer Profile: Rich Wagoner

FROM THE PRESIDENT

ALWAYS REMEMBER!



When Gold Star Mission conducted its first Gold Star 500 bike ride from Cairo, IL to St Charles, IL, most of us had not anticipated that in our fifth year of our mission, we would reflect and see that we have connected with dozens of Illinois Gold Star Families, hundreds of communities, and thousands of citizens across the State of Illinois. Did we believe that after five years, we would say that we have awarded nearly 200 scholarships of \$1,000 each, in the name of our Fallen Heroes? I am not sure we did, but today, as we look back at our accomplishments, not only are we proud of what we have done, but we are also eager and ready to do more.

In 2017, I had the honor of being the GS 500 Ride Director. Our inaugural ride. Our first event. Wow, what an undertaking and wow, did we learn so much. Our mission was quickly expanded and today, as I sit in the position of President of Gold Star Mission, I am amazed at all the wonderful relationships that have been established and by the hundreds of dedicated and supportive individuals and organizations that are with us along this journey. We are truly blessed to have each one of you.

In 2021, beginning our fifth year, I was humbled by the mention of me filling the boots of our first President, Mr. Dave Helfrich. A task which still seems beyond my grasp. But I am honored to be here today, as we close out our fifth year and prepare to move into the next phase of our mission.

The team of volunteers, from elected officers and advisors to those that have accepted roles as committee chairs. From the behind-the-scenes supporters to the volunteers that take on any, and all tasks asked of them. From our riders and runners, of the events we host, to those that await our arrival and urge us forward. I couldn't be more appreciative of your willingness and eagerness to help us grow our mission. A mission that will never be complete, but we will always strive to accomplish.

I look forward to our coming years and am eager to see our growth, but more importantly, I look forward to seeing the thousands more that we connect with and share the story of each of our Fallen Heroes. I look forward to hearing the names of our Fallen Heroes spoken in other groups and organizations, as they reflect on the sacrifices of our Fallen Heroes and their Gold Star Families.

NEVER FORGET!

Trenton N Thompson
President, Gold Star Mission

WHAT WE'RE ABOUT



The Gold Star Mission was established in 2017 in Springfield, Illinois after several veterans and friends, moved by stories of the Gold Star Families that lost a loved one in Afghanistan or Iraq, took action to help others in need. What started as a desire to provide scholarships for surviving children has evolved into widespread effort to assist Gold Star Families and others in need in order to preserve the memory of our fallen Military Heroes.

Gold Star Mission Strategy

Mission: Inspire people and mobilize resources in service to others; as a lasting remembrance of our Fallen Military Heroes.

Vision: A nation of communities inspired to Always Remember and Never Forget the names of fallen Military Heroes, value their sacrifices and honor their families.

Objectives:

- Provide Support to Gold Star Families
- Ensure Lasting Remembrance of our Fallen Heroes
- Mobilize Resources
- Inspire People

Values:

Honorable:

Be worthy of the trust and esteem of Gold Star Families, the public and our fallen Military Heroes.

Relevant:

Be pertinent to the matter at hand; in our case, devotion to pursuing our objectives to achieve the mission of remembering our fallen Military Heroes.

A GOLD STAR FAMILY TESTIMONIAL

My name is Jodi Trussel. I became a Gold Star wife on May 26, 2007 when my husband Francis was killed in action in Iraq. In September of this year the Gold Star Mission reached out to me, thankfully because this was the first time I've ever heard of this wonderful organization. Eric explained to me what they did and invited me and my two sons, Jaden and Malikye out to see what they do. The Gold Star Mission riders ride 500 miles on bicycles to honor and remember all our fallen Illinois heroes. They do this over the span of five days and take daily breaks where they stop and honor the Soldiers.

One of the stops was at the Deland-Weldon High School. This school is very dear to my heart as my late husband and I both graduated from there and both of our children are students there. We knew this would be a very special morning for our family. That morning before the riders arrived, Jaden and Malikye were able to help the volunteers set up. Jaden even got to put up

his dad's yard sign and that was very special for him. They had a front row parking spot for me when I arrived. The volunteers gave me and the boys shirts and made us feel very welcome and involved. They explained to us about the riders and then we chatted until they arrived. Connie made me feel very welcome and was so sweet and supportive. I could hear the music playing from the truck before I could see the riders. I was definitely not emotionally prepared to see them. They were beautifully matched in red shirts and had the names of the fallen soldiers on their bike tags. I immediately burst into tears feeling so many emotions. I felt such a sense of pride, honor and strength for my husband and his service. After everyone rode in, I got to thank them briefly and then Eric said a prayer. He also said the names of the fallen soldiers, one of them being my husband, it was a beautiful emotional tribute. Eric also announced who the boys and I were.



Afterwards they had about 10 minutes left before they had to hit the road again. We talked to the riders and thanked them. We then got to meet the rider who rode in honor of my husband, our Soldier. He took some pics with the boys and his bike. He then let Jaden attempt to ride his bike. I say attempt because the bike was too tall for Jaden and he almost fell off. It was a good laugh for everyone. They then invited us to dinner later that night. Watching them all ride away was very emotional and touched our hearts. It means so much to our family to know that even 14 years later, Frank's life and sacrifice is still not just remembered, but honored. They truly will never forget and that meant the world to us.

Later that evening the boys and I met them for dinner. It was beautiful to see them all resting and thinking how strong and resilient they must be to ride 500 miles. Such a selfless act that meant everything to us. So many of them came up and talked to us and made us feel like family. They also wanted to get to know more about Frank as the person not just the Soldier. That was very special to us as a lot of times he is only talked about as the Soldier he was, not the husband, father, and friend he was. They gave me the opportunity to speak which I thought would be hard but they made me feel comfortable and I was able to talk for a good little



bit. I shared stories from Frank's childhood and all the way throughout his life. It was a great way for me to remember him and honor him. The memories that flooded back filled me with a peace that my heart truly needed. I've never given a speech like that before in front of my boys so it was a very special time for them to hear more about their dad's life.

I was grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the day to honor and remember not just our fallen hero but so many others. We also met a couple of other Gold Star Family members from our area, which we always cherish as finding someone who understands is rare for us.

We are looking forward to helping with next year's event and helping to get the word out to other families like us. They also invited my sons to apply for their college scholarships when they are able to. This is such a great way to honor the Soldiers' sacrifice and keep their legacy going. Each scholarship is in one of the names of the fallen Soldiers. We can't wait to see the recipient of Frank's scholarship and see where they go in life. Such a touching



opportunity to keep their memory alive. The Gold Star Mission gave our hearts something we didn't realize we were missing and we are truly grateful for the experience.



2021 ACTIVITIES REPORT



Corporal Sean Mahe; 19, Grayslake
Marine Corps Corporal Alex Mar
Lansing IL ~
29, Crystal L
Jason McLe
Staff Sergean
IL ~ Army Pr
23, Napervil
Nathaniel M
Marine Corp
26, Champai
Newgard, 20
IL ~ Army Se
IL ~ Army Sp
36, Waukega
John Olson,
Senior Chief
29, E



2021 – another year older!

Well, based on 2020, anything had to be better.....right? It was most certainly better than 2020, and exciting and different from previous years. By the time 2021 had ended, things were really starting to look a lot more normal. Fingers crossed!

The year started off again with a couple of Virtual events, again due to COVID concerns and restrictions. By July, there were far fewer restrictions and social distancing requirements, so The Gold Star Mission team hit the road!

Tyler Glynn and his team organized and executed the fifth annual General Logan 200 in early July. Just under a dozen riders and a half dozen volunteers completed the 200-mile endurance bicycling event from the General John A. Logan Museum in Murphysboro to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Springfield. This endurance bicycling event begins late Friday evening, riding through the night, and ending late Saturday afternoon. With the exception of a few short, scheduled halts, the riders keep pedaling towards the finish line.

In a purely coincidental moment of fate, the General Logan 200 team came across Mr. Jim Frazier, father of SSgt Jacob Frazier (the first Illinois National Guardsman killed after 9-11), at a



rest stop in Raymond Illinois. Jim was driving south from Illinois towards Florida, and had by sheer coincidence stopped at the Shell Gas Station, just off I-55 in Raymond for gas at

the same time the General Logan 200 team was wrapping up their rest stop! It was a very memorable moment for all, as Jim had been an integral part of the Gold Star Mission team since the beginning. There were many more memorable stops along the 2021 General Logan

2021, but none more inspiring!

With things moving back towards normal, Veteran's Day at the State Fair in Springfield was the first big in-person awareness event in 2021. The Gold Star Mission has been a centerpiece for the Veteran's Day activities since 2017.

Numerous folks stopped by, along with a few Gold Star Families. Unlike in the past, many knew about the mission and the bicycling events. We were able to give some folks and veteran service organizations a final heads up of the 2021 Gold Star Mission, but also

the 2022 ride. We found many of the Posts that supported in the past were very aware and proud to support! The State Fair will continue to be a big awareness event for the Gold Star Mission!

2021 EVENTS CALENDAR



MAY 1-15, 2021
VIRTUAL RUN FOR THE FALLEN
 26 PARTICIPANTS STATEWIDE
 198 MILES RUN CUMULATIVELY



JUNE 1-30, 2021
VIRTUAL GS 300/500
 32 PARTICIPANTS STATEWIDE
 14,600 MILES RIDDEN
 CUMULATIVELY



JULY 9-10, 2021
GENERAL LOGAN 200
 7 RIDERS, 4 VOLUNTEERS
 1,526 MILES RIDDEN
 CUMULATIVELY



JULY 17, 2021
MOAA LAND OF LINCOLN
CHAPTER GOLF OUTING
 32 PARTICIPANTS



AUGUST 14, 2021
VETERANS DAY
AT THE ILLINOIS STATE FAIR
 14 PARTICIPANTS



SEPTEMBER 21-25
GOLD STAR 500
 18 RIDERS, 40+ VOLUNTEERS
 9,990 MILES RIDDEN
 CUMULATIVELY



NOVEMBER 11, 2021
VETERANS DAY AT TEXAS
ROADHOUSE
 16 PARTICIPANTS

IN 2021, PARTICIPANTS IN GOLD STAR MISSION EVENTS RAN NEARLY 200 MILES AND RODE OVER 26,900 MILES!

RUNNERS HAVE LOGGED 4,380 MILES SINCE 2019 AND RIDERS HAVE LOGGED 101,845 MILES SINCE 2017!

2022 EVENTS CALENDAR



20-23 Jan. 2022	Illinois Elks Association Mid-Winter Convention	Springfield, IL
12 Mar. 2022	Scholarship & Appreciation Banquet	Springfield, IL
5 Apr. 2022	Gold Star Spouses Day	
29 Apr.	2022 NGAI Conference	
8 May 2022	Mother's Day	
21 May 2022	GSM Run for the Fallen	Rockford, IL
30 May 2022	Memorial Day	
1-30 Jun. 2022	GSM Virtual 500 (Kick-off on Memorial Day)	
9-12 Jun. 2022	VFW State Conference	Springfield, IL
19 Jun. 2022	Father's Day	
4 July 2022	Independence Day	
8-9 Jul. 2022	GSM General Logan 200	Ending in Springfield
14-16 Jul. 2022	American Legion State Conference	Springfield, IL
1 Aug. 2022	Gold Star Children's Day	
14 Aug. 2022	IL State Fair Veteran's Day	Springfield, IL
27 Aug. 2022	MOAA Golf Outing	Petersburg, IL
20-24 Sep. 2022	GSM GS 500	Starts Springfield, IL
25 Sep. 2022	Gold Star Mother's & Family Day	
1 Nov. 2022	Scholarship Application Opens	Website
11 Nov. 2022	Veteran's Day	
17 Dec. 2022	Wreaths Across America	National Cemeteries
*Other Dates - to be published	Gold Star Families Memorial Dedication	Springfield, IL



2021 FINANCIAL REPORT



BY THE NUMBERS

Gold Star Mission is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. One hundred percent of the donations we receive support the Gold Star Mission. Ninety-five percent pays for the programs, the balance goes to supporting our established programs. To date, more than almost \$317,000 has gone directly to programs designed to Always Remember, Never Forget our Fallen Military Heroes, value their sacrifices, and honor their families.

We strive to be transparent in our operations by making the following information publicly available:

EXPENSES	2021	CUMULATIVE
Program Srvices (Scholarships, Events, etc.)	\$69,618.89	\$316,828.33
General and Administrative	\$2,516.74	\$14,083.33
Office Expenses, Salaries, Facilities	\$0	\$0
Total Expenses	\$72,135.63	\$330,911.93
REVENUES	2021	CUMULATIVE
Individual Donations	\$101,286.53	\$364,757.91
Corporate Grants	\$10,860.18	\$108,908.35
Total Revenues	\$112,146.71	\$473,666.26



SHINING BRIGHT



27 Activities in the first 5 years



Thousands of people engaged



Hundreds of communities engaged



+2.3k

Over 2,300 Facebook Friends



+1.2k

Over 1,200 engagements on Social Media Posts



Countless shared memories



Nearly 102,000 miles ridden during GSM events



Nearly 4,400 miles walked/run during GSM events



\$0.95 on each dollar raised is spent on program cost

0

ZERO cost associated with salaries or facilities



All to honor over 290 Illinois Fallen Heroes and their families



\$164,000 in scholarships awarded

GOAL ORIENTED

OUR PARTNERHIP WITH ISU



In 2019, Gold Star Mission partnered with members of the Department of Psychology and School of Social Work at Illinois State University to conduct a program evaluation assessing how well GSM was meeting its goals. In addition, the evaluation helped identify areas for growth. The evaluation included both an on-line survey and two focus groups. GSM leadership had input into the development of the questions for both methods of gathering information.

The purpose of the on-line survey was to provide GSM leadership with a quantitative approach to evaluating GSM programming focusing on GSM's marquis event, the September 2020 Gold Star 500 cycling event. In addition to demographic questions, this survey included questions concerning participants' perceptions of how closely GSM activities align with GSM goals and the degree to which participation in GSM activities engenders a sense of belonging and influences their meaning in life. Participants who were veterans answered questions assessing how participation in GSM activities influences their

perception of social support from their fellow military veterans, service members or military institutions. Forty-three Gold Star 500 riders and volunteers participated by responding to recruitment emails with an anonymous survey link. Three of these respondents were Gold Star Family members and 22 were associated with a Gold Star Family in some way. Seventy percent of the participants serve or have served in the United States military.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a move from an in-person ride to a virtual one, potentially tempering the impact of the event on its participants, volunteers, and Gold Star Families. A virtual ride reduced the opportunity for camaraderie and interaction with the community, Gold Star Families, and other veterans. Still, participants reported that the GSM was meeting its goals and that the GSM was providing a general sense of belonging. There were significant positive relationships between perceived GSM success and a sense of belonging and desire for future GSM event participation. There were also positive relationships between the GSM success

GOAL ORIENTED

OUR PARTNERHIP WITH ISU

and perceived greater social support from their fellow military veterans, service members and military institutions. Participants reported a greater sense of belonging in the military community.

Study respondents also indicated that participation in the GSM Gold Star 500 improved their mental health through increased meaning in life. These results provided support for the GSM meeting its goals overall. Respondents provided ideas for future GSM growth that included engaging with large military installations to expand the number of participants and helping connect GSM participants with services. Respondents also recommended making a concerted effort to involve more women and individuals from minority communities in future events.

As a follow-up to the on-line survey, ISU conducted two focus groups with 19 participants and volunteers in the 2021 Gold Star 500 bicycling event. Questions posed to participants included those centering around:

Awareness - In what ways is the GSM effective in raising awareness of the significance of the phrase "Gold Star Family?"

Support Seeking - How can GSM better facilitate community support for its members?

Healing - How has involvement in a Gold Star Mission event helped you be better emotionally, physically, and/or spiritually?

Impact on Others - What effects have the GSM activities had on other people you know?

Social Support - In what ways does participating in Gold Star Mission events make you feel supported?

Preliminary analysis of focus group responses

were consistent with the results of the previous on-line survey. GSM activities are perceived to increase awareness of Gold Star Families through the scholarship program, bike rides and talks to school groups. Other suggestions were offered to further increase awareness among a broader population. Focus group responses indicated that participation

in the various GSM-sponsored activities have significantly impacted participants emotionally, physically and spiritually (through the bike ride) and ongoing connections with Gold Star Families.)

Focus group participants also noted GSM activities provide Gold Star Family members with the opportunity to share their "memories and stories" and engage in the healing process.

GSM activities also increased patriotism among nonparticipants like school children and community volunteers. Participation in GSM events also provided camaraderie for participants. The activities gave opportunities for healing by providing an avenue for participants to reflect on why they participate. This centered around remembering the sacrifices of our Fallen Heroes and the Gold Star Families. A number of suggestions were offered to increase the visibility of GSM and increase participation in events by members of the military, veterans and the general public.

In summary, this assessment and evaluation of program effectiveness show that the GSM is meeting its goals and many suggestions for future growth were provided. Future focus groups are being considered for members of Gold Star Families to identify and assess how GSM can better meet their needs.





Feona 12 ~ Army First Lieutenant Paul Southworth, 20, Oakland 12



Tyrrell 21 Sterling 11 ~ Marine Corps Lance Corporal Drew Uhles



First Class Sean Car
Macomb Il ~ Army



~ Marine Corps Land



SPONSORS AND DONORS



Army Specialstry



OUR SPONSORS

PREMIER SPONSORS



Elks Association of Illinois



American Legion
Post 568



American Legion
Riders 568

GOLD SPONSORS



SILVER SPONSORS



OUR PARTNERS



ADM

ADM-Veterans

Albion Fire Department

American Legion Dept. of Illinois

American Legion Post #117- Cerro Gordo

American Legion Post #1197- Oxford (Alpha)

American Legion Post #120- Effingham

American Legion Post #128- Salem

American Legion Post #201- Newman

American Legion Post #289- Strawsburg

American Legion Post #386- Virden

American Legion Post #405- Pana

American Legion Post #423- Mt. Carmel

American Legion Post #446- Centralia

American Legion Post #543- Patoka

American Legion Post #55- Farmer City

American Legion Post #586- Pawnee

American Legion Post #73- Taylorville

American Legion Post #905- Kincaid

American Legion Post #95- Vandalia

Becktech Communications Group

BNC Bicycle & Fitness

Bob Ridings Ford

Casey's General Stores

Cerro Gordo High School

Corn Crib Restaurant

Davis Family McDonald's

Deland-Weldon High School & Elementary

Edwards County High School

Effingham High School

Elks Lodge #1208- Lawrenceville

Elks Lodge #819- Mt. Vernon

Engrained Brewery & Restaurant

Farm and Home Supply Store

Farmer City High School

Friendly Chevrolet

Fritz Pfister Re/Max

Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley High School

Glosser Bike Repair

Grecco Graphics

Hy-Vee

Illinois Fallen Heroes Traveling Memorial Wall

Illinois National Guard

Illinois State Police

Irvington Ruritan Community Club

ISU Department of Psychology

Knights of Columbus 2321-Virden

Kroger's

Lawrenceville McDonald's Restaurant

Law Office of William Hotopp

Lincoln's Challenge Academy

Lowe's Home Improvement Store

OUR PARTNERS



McGraw's Family McDonald's
 Meijer
 Memorial Health Systems
 Midland Community Bank
 MJ Kellner
 MOAA- Lincoln Land Chapter
 Mt. Carmel High School
 Music Shoppe
 Paris High School
 Pawnee Fire Department
 Pawnee High School
 Paxton Fire Department
 Paxton- Buckley-Loda High School
 Primal Wear
 PS Printing
 R.E. Franks Meeting Center-Philo
 Redmon Fire Department
 Runner's Image
 Scout Troop #73-Pawnee
 Sons of American Legion Post #1197-Oxford
 (Alpha)
 Springfield Fire Department
 Springfield Texas Roadhouse
 Springhill Suites by Marriott Springfield
 Southwest
 Strawsburg Community Center
 Survivor Outreach Services
 Target
 Taylorville Senior High School

The Walmart Foundation
 Troxell Insurance
 U-Haul
 United Community Bank
 VET Center-Peoria
 VET Center-Springfield
 VFW Dept. of IL
 VFW Post #10302-Springfield
 VFW Post #2876-Villa Grove
 VFW Post #3601-Paris
 VFW Post #4276-Mt. Carmel
 VFW Post #4495-Taylorville
 VFW Post #4535-Fairfield
 VFW Post #4549-Robinson
 VFW Post #4763-Chatham
 VFW Post #4829-Shelbyville
 VFW Post #5975-Marshall
 VFW Post #630-Urbana
 VFW Post #7676-Altamont
 VFW Post #99-Decatur
 VFW Riders Post #4495
 Wabash County CUSD #348-Mt. Carmel
 Wayne City Fire Department
 Wayne City High School
 Wheelfast Bicycle Co.
 York Township Community Center

As a non-profit organization, Gold Star Mission relies on contributions from our donors, sponsors and partners. Your contributions are the reason we can continue our mission to make sure to ALWAYS REMEMBER and NEVER FORGET our fallen Military Heroes, their families, and their sacrifices. What may seem like a small donation from you, whether it be your time, money, or support during an programmed event, Gold Star Mission can't operate without your support!



SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



GOLD STAR MISSION

Gold Star Mission defines a Gold Star Family as any military family who has suffered the loss of a loved one while engaged in military service to our great country.

Always Remember, Never Forget!

SCHOLARSHIP + APPRECIATION BANQUET

In a dimly lit banquet hall there sits rows of tables draped in white linen, places are set with fine china and silverware. The room is adorned with photos and signs memorializing the more than 290 fallen Military Heroes from Illinois. The mood in the room is somber, but the conversation is light-hearted and everyone is having a good time. The tables are full of a wide range of people; at one sits a Gold Star Family, a Vietnam veteran, a kind person and teenager and their family.

Everyone there is there for one purpose: to remember those who died in service to our nation.

Our Scholarship and Appreciation Banquet bridges generations while amplifying the voices of our Gold Star Families. It's also an opportunity for us to thank all who make each of our events possible, the participants, the volunteers, and our donors and partners.

Though we weren't able to host our normal scholarship and appreciation banquet last year due to COVID, we're extremely excited to be able to hold our next banquet in 2022! We all come together to remember and carry on the legacies of our Fallen Heroes through investing in the next generation and sharing the lives of those who have gone before them.



SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES 2021

Brady Behrent

Marine 1st SGT Edward Smith, 4/4/2003, Chicago

Kolton Behrent

Army SGT Joseph Vanek, 11/12/2007, Elmhurst

Alexis Blanton

Army PFC Jacob Tracy, 6/18/2007, Palestine

Nate Borders

Marine Cpl Joshua Palmer, 118/2004, Blandinsville

Jack Buerkett

Army SGT Holli Bolinski, 3/5/2019, Pinckneyville

Sydney Condon

Amy SPC John Sullivan, 11/15/2003, Countryside

Isaiah Deiters

Marine LCpl Aaron Pickering, 11/10/2004, Marion

Derek Dickerson

Navy PO1 Thomas Hull, 8/2/2005, Princeton

Haley Dotson

Army SPC Adriana Salem, 3/4/2005, Elk Grove Village

Ryan Ess

Marine LCpl Joshua Hines, 10/15/2006, Olney

Zach Fisher

Navy SN Carlos Mazon, 4/23/2017, Chicago

Hailey Glaub

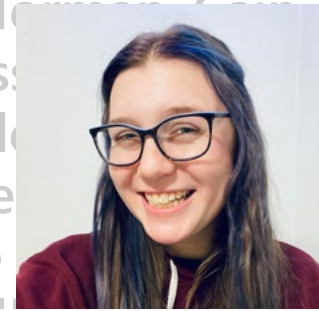
Navy MMFR Bryant Davis, 11/7/2001, Chicago

Marisa Haskell

Army CPL Jeffrey Williams, 9/5/2005, Warrenville

Aubrey Headon

Army CPT David Schultz II, CPT 1/31/2008, Blue Island



Kaylee Wobig

I am beyond grateful for my Gold Star Mission Scholarship, as it continues to impact me to this day. The scholarship allowed me to purchase a laptop. Such technology was ever more necessary with the onset of COVID. Not only has my laptop been a tremendous resource to aid me in research and homework, but it was literally how I went to class everyday last year. As a cinema major, my laptop has allowed me to make my films come to life. My laptop is a tool that has helped me to become an honors scholar as I endeavor to excel in my studies. With this scholarship, I can work to make many soldiers' names and stories heard and remembered. I am continually grateful for those who gave their all for our country, and I strive to work as hard as they did in hopes of honoring their sacrifice.

SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES 2021



Zack Fisher

This past semester the GSM scholarship has helped a lot with college expenses. I am currently in the Navy ROTC program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach Florida, which does cover a decent amount of college expenses. Although ROTC helps a lot with tuition, the GSM scholarship has helped with the smaller stuff I have a need for at college. For instance, I have used the GSM scholarship to help pay for notebooks, food, and other things that the ROTC scholarship doesn't provide for. The GSM scholarship has helped a lot with covering the expenses of college. Whenever I get the chance, I think about who my scholarship was awarded in honor of, SN Carlos Mazon, and all of those who have served and gave their lives so that I could have the opportunities that I do. I hope to one day carry that same courage and commitment into the United States Navy.

Jackson Hyde

Army PFC Danny Kimme, 1/16/2008, Fisher

Hannah Johnson

Army PFC Devin Michel, 10/24/2009, Stockton

Shelby Johnson

Marine LCpl Drew Uhles, 9/15/2004, DuQuoin

Luke June

Army SGT Kenneth Ridgley, 3/30/2005, Olney

Hannah Knowles

Marine PFC Geoffrey Morris, 4/4/2004, Gurnee

Braden Lemke

Army SSG Roberto Andrade Jr, 1/18/2009, Chicago

Chloe Leonard

Marine CPL Kevin Clarke, 2/19/2005, Tinley Park

Chase Luebeck

Army CPT Shane Mahaffee, 5/15/2006, Gurnee

Ambria Maddox

Army 1LT Debra Banaszak, 10/28/2005, Bloomington

Liam Monahan

Air Force SRA Daniel Johnson, 10/5/2010, Schiller Park

Jordi Oliver

Marine Cpl Jonathan Beatty, 1/27/2005, Streator

Dominic Orr

Army CPL Jeremiah Costello, 6/2/2007, Carlinville

Emma Phillips

Army SGT Bradley Beste, 8/4/2006, Naperville

Wyatt Sims

Army SGT Christopher Wagener, 7/1/2004, Fairview Heights

SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES 2021

Cali Smothers

Navy PO2 Ryan Burris, 5/21/2015, Lisle

Steven Thompson

Marine LCpl Robert Newton, 8/23/2010, Creve Couer

Nick Timmerman

Army SGT Andrew Lancaster, 8/11/2007, Stockton
IL

Megan Vogt

Marine LCpl Torrey Stoffel-Gray, 4/11/2004, Patoka

Kylee Wehrly

Army SPC Lucas Starcevich, 4/16/2007, Canton

Macey Westrick

Marine LCpl Phillip Frank, 4/8/2005, Elk Grove

Hannah Williams

Army PFC Michael Olivieri, 6/6/2011, Chicago

Hailey Winslow

Army PFC Adam Dobereiner, 11/18/2011, Moline

Andrew Wojtkow

Army SGT Eric Lill, 7/6/2007, Chicago



Hannah Williams

My name is Hannah Williams and I am honored to say I was awarded the Gold Star Mission Scholarship. The financial support through my first semester of college was affected greatly by the generous amount I was awarded. The Gold Star Mission Scholarship allowed me to focus more on my studies and worry less about my financial troubles. Books in college are very expensive, but I was able to use some of my scholarship money for my books. This scholarship did not only support me financially but boosted my determination as well. I have always been determined to successfully complete my future goals, and the extra scholarship money played a role in pushing myself to be better. To this day I am still extremely grateful to say I won a scholarship from such a respected organization.



GOLD STAR MISSION HAS AWARDED

\$164,000

IN SCHOLARSHIPS IN HONOR OF ILLINOIS' FALLEN HEROES SINCE WE STARTED OUR MISSION TO ALWAYS REMEMBER AND NEVER FORGET





GSM LEADERSHIP



2021 GSM LEADERSHIP

BOARD MEMBERS & KEY LEADERS

Gold Star Mission Corporation (All officers serve one-year term; that may be extended until successor has been elected)

Current Board

President

Trent Thompson

Vice President

Matt Jones

Secretary

Chris Milchuck

Treasurer

Tim Barnhart

Former Board Members

Vice President - Andrew Adamczyk
(17 Mar 2021 - 1 Nov 2021)

Secretary - Matt Jones
(17 Mar 2021 - 1 Nov 2021)

Treasurer - Larry Stone
(17 Mar 2021 - 31 Dec 2021)

Other Key Leaders

Director of Operations

Eric Murray

Assistant to the Director of Operations

Chuck Kitson

Communications Director

Kathy Kelnhofer

Volunteer Director

Julie Spradlin

Scholarship Director

Tyler Glynn

GSM Run for The Fallen Director

Candace White

General Logan 200 Director

Tyler Glynn

Gold Star 500 Director

Eric Murray

GOLD STAR MISSION ADVISORY COUNCIL

The advisory council involves thoughtful leaders who regularly provide advice to the Gold Star Mission Leadership, and serve as a resource to help guide the direction of the organization and navigate its future.

Major General (ret.) William Enyart

Former Adjutant General
Illinois National Guard

Major General (ret.) Mark Rabin

Former General,
Illinois Air National Guard

Brigadier General (ret.) Steve Huber

Former Deputy Commanding General,
1st Army Division East

Brigadier General (ret.) Chris Lawson

Vice Director J5
National Guard Bureau

Colonel (ret.) Troy Philips

Former Commander of 404th
Maneuver Enhancement Brigade

LTC David Helfrich

Founder and former President
Gold Star Mission

LTC Andrew Adamczyk

Co-Founder and former Vice President
Gold Star Mission

Frazier, 24
Sery, 23
ne
Jo
, 2
37
Barto
Sta
on
k
nsk
Hale, 23,
, 2
21,
Har
cy



COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: RICH WAGONER

I have been involved in the Gold Star Mission for four years. Coming from a family that has lost a son due to tragic death and another son that was classified as Missing in Action (Vietnam War) for a period, I know

what it is like to lose a loved one. The pain and memory never go away. When I found out there was a way to help others in honoring and remembering their loved-ones, I wanted to be a small part of that effort.

My good friend, retired Brigadier General Mark Rabin introduced me to the GOLD STAR MISSION. As an avid bicycle rider, he had actually participated in the Gold Star Mission's Gold Star 500, to raise money for scholarships to be awarded in the name of Fallen Service Men and Women from Illinois since 9-11. This annual event covers 500 miles or more in 5 days! Yes -you read correctly - 500 miles in 5 days. During this event Gold Star Families are invited to meet the riders along the route. The Gold Star 500 riders wear specially designed jerseys during the event, and wear them with pride! Jerseys can be personalized with the name of a Fallen Hero on the back.

At that time, I thought riding 10 miles in a day a big deal. Little was I to know what I would witness as a volunteer. I was asked to follow the riders driving a support vehicle to pick up

riders and their bicycles along the route if they encountered mechanical problems. I was glad to help. I assumed it would be a boring job following bicycles for 500 miles, but it was for a good cause. I was in for a shock. During the last four years as the

SAG driver, I can honestly say I have not had one boring second.

Hey, these people are just plain crazy! They average speeds of 18-20 mph and bunch up for efficiency to reduce air drag so if one person crashes, they all either crash, or quickly have to figure a way to avoid disaster. They have to be alert at all times. I have seen more wrecks than I care to remember in my ring side

seat behind the pace line. Riders slamming into each other, sliding off slick roads through farm ditches and road barriers. I have seen bicycles split in two pieces and others bent beyond repair.

But the bloodied-up riders somehow patch their bikes up or get on another bike loaned by our fantastic sponsor bike shops. Every second of every ride is dangerous. It's a cross between a screaming, diving eagle and a runaway locomotive with loose wheels.

If you see a rider with a Gold Star jersey you are looking at a member of an elite group. Soldiers, Airmen, Veterans, Doctors, Pastors, white collar, blue collar, no collar - they represent a cross section of dedicated people motivated to



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: RICH WAGONER

stamp - WE WILL NEVER FORGET on top of a tragic situation. They do it with a zeal that makes you proud to be an American.

After the first year, I was given a Gold Star jersey. It had the name of a Fallen Soldier on the back. I decided to learn his story. I didn't feel like I deserved to wear the jersey, but at least I could frame it or put it on display. On the back was the name of Army 1st Lieutenant Derwin Williams from Chicago. Derwin was a drill instructor and a 16-year member of the Illinois Army National Guard. He was

killed in Afghanistan. He served honorably in Iraq and volunteered for a subsequent Afghan duty. His experience was needed to help save lives there. He was a father figure in the boot camps to inmates that never had a father and he was a father figure in the field to younger soldiers that needed someone to show them the way to survive. His life was tragically taken when a roadside bomb exploded. He was 41. It is said he never had an unkind word and his soft-spoken manner calmed the terror in others. I can't say enough about his character so I will just tell him now that I will never forget him and others shouldn't either. He is survived by his lovely wife and 4 daughters and a son. They can be proud of him as we all are.

I looked at his jersey every day and finally got to wear it proudly when I participated in the 2020 virtual Gold Star 500. Last year COVID canceled the event and we were challenged to ride the 500 miles at our own pace, during the month of



September. Hey, I'm in on those terms. Riders were recognized for the fastest times and other categories that I knew I couldn't compete in, but I was just glad to be included in the event. I decided I would ride the most miles in a month and be the tortoise not the hare. So, I decided to ride 1500 miles, rain or shine, in 30 days.

It wasn't easy, but when I put on Derwin's jersey I was ready to go. Derwin and I knocked it out! I thought I had finished the 1500 miles early on the last day, but I got a call from Chuck Kitson and he said I was short about 43.4 miles (Chuck is the ride coordinator you don't want to mess with). I had taken Derwin's jersey off and was ready to throw it in the washing machine and have a BUD LITE (or two). "Well" I said to Derwin, "What should I do?". I could hear

his voice say " You have done enough, have a beer on me". I replied, "Nope, you and I have one more ride together then we can have that beer together". Let me tell you those last miles on that dark windy night were the easiest miles I have ever ridden. I had ridden 24 total rides with an average distance of 64.3 miles, I also had ridden three 100 miles legs with Derwin. I couldn't have done it without him kindly urging me on. I am 71 years old but, on that ride, I was young again with a mission - a Gold Star Mission - to ALWAYS REMEMBER AND NEVER FORGET. You can do the same thing. Derwin will show you how. Please join us!





**GOLD
STAR
MISSION**

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HELP US
CONTINUE OUR MISSION AND SPREAD
THE WORD TO**

ALWAYS REMEMBER, NEVER FORGET

FIND US ON THE WEB OR ON SOCIAL MEDIA



www.goldstarmission.org



www.facebook.com/GoldstarMission



www.instagram.com/goldstarmission



www.youtube.com



ALWAYS REMEMBER, NEVER FORGET



**GOLD
STAR
MISSION**