

Northeast Kansas Gold Star Mothers Chapter Ceremony
Main Post Chapel
Fort Leavenworth, KS
14 DEC 2008
As Delivered

As you look up front at the table you can see just how precious life really is. Mothers set out significant items from their sons' lives – bronzed baby shoes, favorite movies, and pictures. Each reminder is special and unique, just as your sons were. Your families have all given so much to our country.

You know our team asked Diana and some of the others ladies here today what tone they would like us to take with our remarks, and they said “keep it light.” I am humbled that you have asked me to say a few words....although words seem a bit inadequate. Just being in your presence is uplifting.

I want to thank everyone who had a role in today's ceremony for all the hard work and coordination that went into organizing this chapter and making this event a reality. I would also like to thank the members of our local VFW, American Legion, and Patriot Guard for your support today.

Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, said, “It is for us the living.... to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion”

That's what we are doing here today. Your dedication to the unfinished work of your sons is unrivaled. You honor your loved ones daily by your work with the American Gold Star Mothers, and we are truly humbled by that devotion.

You all have comforted one another when others avoided you because they didn't know what to say. You've reached out and found other hurting moms throughout the state – throughout the region. You've helped raise awareness so others didn't grieve and cope alone. In doing so, you honor our veterans.

A veteran - whether active duty, retired, national guard or reserve - is someone who, at one point in his or her life, wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America," for an amount of "up to and including their life." Service members love what they do – the profession of arms, and they choose to serve, but Families don't get a choice – they allow us to serve because they love us.

What a supportive group of Families your sons were privileged to have – your work with the American Gold Star Mothers is a testament to the continued love you have for your Service members and for our Nation.

This truly feels like a family event – you have become such an important part of each others' lives...and ours. We are blessed to have you in this community. My wife Stephanie and I have been personally blessed by getting to know you all.

The American Gold Star Mothers are a proud group with a rich history going back to 1918. The service flag is displayed from homes, places of business, churches, and schools to indicate the number of members of a family or organization who are serving in the Armed Forces or who have died from such service. Service flags have a deep blue star for each living member in the service and a gold star for each member who gave their life. Thus, the gold star and the term Gold Star Mother, as applied to mothers whose sons or daughters died in service to the Nation was adopted.

As I've talked with this group, I'm amazed at how close you become and how well you get to know each other – you know stories about your sons that some in your extended family probably don't even know about.

Even your dress code is symbolic of your unity and a statement of peace, sacrifice, and goodness. American Gold Star Mothers all proudly dress in white and proudly display their gold star pins....it is a badge of honor...but an honor they all wish they did not have.

We are so honored on this occasion to recognize the beginning of our very own Fort Leavenworth American Gold Star Mothers Chapter – the “Northeast Kansas Gold Star Mothers”, the first ever chapter here.

We are all so proud of our families in this group. While the group does help each other deal with the grief associated with their losses, it is not what these ladies have elected to focus on. Our Gold Star Mothers here are focused on honoring their children through service to veterans and our military community.

I see the same strength that was reflected in the lives of their sons in them – and you honor them by your service and what you are doing here today.

Just this past week, several of these ladies helped the American Legion package Christmas boxes for our veterans at the VA hospital here in town – giving of themselves to help others – to benefit our military family. You all have servants' hearts, and it is apparent to everyone who knows you – we marvel at your example.

Abraham Lincoln once said of America's mothers, "I have never studied the art of paying compliments to women; but I must say, that if all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women were applied to the women of America, it would not do them justice for their conduct during this war. God bless the women of America."

Scripture tells us that faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain...and that a cord of three strands cannot easily be broken. Diane Pitts is only one person, but her faith and strength are what truly deserve recognition, and she's organized our local chapter of the Gold Star Mothers here at Fort Leavenworth while simultaneously leading the effort to bring a veterans memorial to the town of Leavenworth. We all marvel at Diana – a mother, a wife, and a leader. She's no stranger to Fort Leavenworth – she's worked in our “watch-care” program at the chapel for over 20 years. She continually gives to other people.

Look around at the team she's helped bring together – the energy, and commitment of this group is powerful...and you are changing lives – lives of other Gold Star Families, and this community. The trials you've faced and overcome have made you stronger. You are transforming lives and keeping others upbeat, helping others deal with the tragedy you too have faced.

We in the military have a sacred obligation to our fallen warriors and a sacred obligation to their children and our children to never forget what they have given – those who have forever left our ranks.

It is everyone's job to tell the story of the American Soldier – help us continue to honor our fallen Soldiers by remembering the sacrifice they and their Families made on behalf of each and every one of us.

To our Gold Star Families – you are important to us, and you are a part of our military family. We are here to continue to support you. This is a significant and historic day for Fort Leavenworth and we are proud of you...and we honor the memory of your loved ones. May God bless you and may God bless America.