



# Newsletter of the Minnesota Military Family Tribute

September, 2013

Jenifer Navratil-Skjerven, Editor

## BREAKFAST WITH ACTOR GARY SINISE RAISIES FUNDS FOR THE GARY SINISE FOUNDATION & THE MFT



Teri Popp, Gary Sinise, Judy Otter (Gary Sinise Foundation), Bill Popp

On a beautiful summer morning, supporters of military families gathered for breakfast and to hear Gary Sinise discuss the importance of supporting our military families and the work of the Gary Sinise Foundation.

“Freedom and security are precious gifts that we, as Americans, should never take for granted,” said Sinise. “We must do all we can to extend our hand in times of need to those who willingly sacrifice each day to provide that freedom and security. While we can never do enough to show our gratitude to our nation’s defenders, we can always do a little more.”



Event hosts: Warren Herreid, Jeannine Rivet, Gary Sinise, Bill & Teri Popp



Gary Sinise and Staff Sargent Ben Houtkooper

The morning fundraiser followed the prior evening’s concert by Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band to raise funds to support the construction of a Smart-Home for Cpl. Mark Litynski, a New Hope native. Injured during his second deployment in Afghanistan while serving as the point man on a foot patrol, Litynski lost both legs and left forearm. His life, and the life of his family, changed forever.

Enter the Gary Sinise Foundation. With a mission to create and support unique programs designed to entertain, educate, inspire, strengthen and build communities, the Gary Sinise Foundation delivers assistance that benefits the entire military family.



Judy Otter, Bill & Teri Popp, Gary Sinise, Joyce & Bill Sexton



Judy Otter, Gary Sinise, Jeff Fetters (Federated Insurance), Bill & Teri Popp

The Minnesota Military Family Tribute also strives to show compassion, appreciation and support for the families that support our soldiers. As Sinise stated, “It is the entire military family that serves.”

Thanks to the generous donations of so many, the August breakfast raised \$25,000 to be shared between the Gary Sinise Foundation and the Minnesota Military Family Tribute.



MN Military Family Foundation Board Members: Terry Palmer, Gary Olson, Tom Lyons and Bill Popp with Gary Sinise



Mick Anselmo (CBS Radio) Judy Otter, Gary Sinise, Bill & Teri Popp



For more information on these projects, please visit their respective websites at [GarySiniseFoundation.org](http://GarySiniseFoundation.org) and [MilitaryFamilyTribute.com](http://MilitaryFamilyTribute.com)



Gary Sinise, Georgia and Jim Thompson



Gina Sundeen, Gary Sinise and Pam Brueck (Mpls./St. Paul Business Journal)



Volunteer members of the Minnesota Military Family Tribute



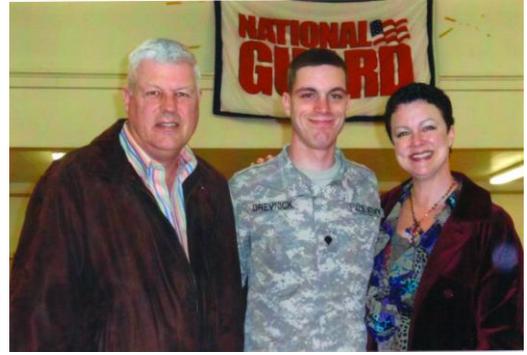
Jack and Cathy Farrell, Gary Sinise

Scheduled to break ground in Spring 2014, the Minnesota Military Family Tribute will forever stand as a thank you to every Minnesota military and veteran family member – past, present and future.

# The Drevnicks: A Gold Star Family Story

*“At 5:00 AM with a knock at the door, my life was forever altered. I stared at the two men dressed in their finest uniform, telling my husband and me that our son was killed in action. All I could think is that I was going to get sick. Through my blurred vision and clouded mind, I tried to focus on my husband. I searched his face for validation that this was real. I feared the worst. I wasn’t dreaming I just became a Gold Star Mother.”*

-Julie Drevnick  
Gold Star Mother



Julie & Ken Drevnick, with son, Dan, who was killed in action, July 17, 2009 in Iraq.

The Minnesota Military Family Tribute (MFT), which will be poised on the grounds of the Minnesota State Capitol Mall, will honor the families of those who have served, or are serving, in the military. For all, the Tribute will serve as a reminder of the sacrifices military and veteran families make to our nation.

There are many types of military families. Blue Star Families are those who have a family member serving in the Armed Forces during any period of war. Gold Star Families are those that lost a loved one as the result of military service to the nation. Veteran Families have someone that actively served in the Armed Forces.

Julie and Ken Drevnick are just one of the many families the MFT has been designed to honor. The Drevnick family made the ultimate sacrifice - the loss of their son, Dan - who was serving in Iraq in 2009 when he was killed in action.

Recently, Julie Drevnick shared her thoughts about the Minnesota Military Family Tribute and how it will help her family heal.

“When we lost our son, Dan, many voices said ‘we will never forget’, said Drevnick. Those memories extend beyond their son to include the entire Drevnick family. “The Military Family Tribute,” Drevnick explains, “is a true testament to the words ‘we will never forget.’”

Serving as a permanent place of healing and reflection, as well as a thank-you to all military and veteran families, the MFT can also serve as a place of education. “Many, many people are unaware of what a Gold Star Family is,” says Drevnick. “Strength comes in numbers and by giving people an opportunity to learn brings that much more support to Gold Star Families.”

The Gold Star Table component of the MFT will honor families that have made the ultimate sacrifice, the loss of a loved one. Drevnick explains, “The Gold Star table will have a significant meaning to us. As people of faith we take comfort knowing our son is in a heavenly place. As a tangible piece, the table can be viewed as a connection to a way of reuniting with our son.”

For the Drevnick family, the Tribute will help them find some peace. “As we live our ‘new’ normal,” says Drevnick, “visiting the Military Family Tribute will be a place of warmth, surrounded by love of a unique family. As we gather with others that share a common thread, the emptiness can be filled with the unspoken words of understanding.”

## Minnesota Military Family Tribute Components



Left:  
Story Stones

Right:  
Gold Star Table

Below:  
Thank You  
Military and  
Veteran Family  
Walkway



*\*Artists sketches are preliminary drafts of the Tribute design. Final design concept is subject to the approval of the MNCAP Board.*

# FROM THE ARCHITECT



Designed to honor the families of active and veteran members of the military, the Minnesota Military Family Tribute will be the first of its kind in the nation. Recently, project architect Ted Lee of HGA Architects and Engineers shared with the MFT the inspiration behind the design.\*

## **MFT: The overall concept is quite moving. What led to the team's focus on such a unique and special concept?**

**Lee:** Upon hearing of the Military Family Tribute (MFT) competition I was immediately drawn to it because I am a Blue Star family member. A Blue Star family is signified by having a family member serve in the United States Military.

My family connections include my oldest son Andrew who deployed twice to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and my brother Tom who has deployed twice to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom Afghanistan. I and others on HGA's team have additional military family connections as well. These direct connections allowed our team to focus our efforts on what is meaningful and emotive for families and service members. We were then able to express these deep emotions through three main motifs - a walk, home and stars.

A walk symbolizes a procession or journey to bridge the distance between those who are away. Both the soldier and family share a desire to reunite with the larger community they call home.

What is home? Is it a place, a feeling, or a memory? The word home conjures up images like warmth, comfort, nourishment, laughter, fireplaces, love, gathering for holidays, a place to feel safe, a place of rest and support, a place where one feels welcome. Besides the family's goal of the soldier returning home, is the desire that, at this tribute, military families themselves feel at home. The Capitol building has been referred to as "the people's house," thus the spaces in the allegorical lawn or yard connote these feelings. When asked, "Where is home?" Minnesotans often reply by naming the county they are from. The Walkway connects a physical piece of each county a military family calls home with the Capitol Mall. In one space along the Tribute, 87 large stones will be collected from the 87 Minnesota counties; an actual piece of the earth from home will be assembled to represent the many homes within our state and create a beautiful unified diversity. There is a strong desire on the Capitol Mall to link each of the military memorials. For this reason, we designed a broad, sweeping gesture with formal plantings to create continuity on the Mall instead of further fragmenting it with additional pieces. Our design anchors the Capitol Mall by supporting and embracing each of the military memorials as families have supported the military through each conflict. The family is the common element between each memorial on the Mall, so it is fitting the tribute links them and broadens the context of military families' support. When a military unit returns to the state, The MFT can serve as a first stop for a reunited family; welcoming them home with a tangible symbol of the community's gratitude and continued support.

The design acknowledges the representation of the star, a commonly used symbol in the military, and expresses it with a broad interpretation. There is a global celestial experience that presents commonly to our senses and will be eternally shared between all humans. The global language of stars in the night sky transcends barriers of distance between families and deployed soldiers; to the family whose soldier has passed on, it also symbolizes something greater and outside of time. To older civilizations, the stars were used to map their way home, and this shared scale exists throughout time and distance.

## **MFT: The components of the Tribute are very unique. Why were these particular items selected?**

**Lee:** *Thank You Military Family Walkway* - The Walkway is expressed as a graceful arc which responds to the seasons. Majestic rows of sugar maples line the path, providing shade in the summer and places of rest on two-sided, backed wooden benches. Fall brings a symphony of color, as the trees turn from gold to orange then to red, finally dropping their leaves in the season of silhouettes. During winter, the ash-grey bark of the formal plantings creates a contrast of color and texture with freshly fallen snow. In the spring, vibrant beds of red flowering and foliage plants announce the entrance to the tribute as a tie to the memory of our veterans. The beauty of The Walkway in all seasons symbolizes a sweeping gesture of gratitude to all of Minnesota's military families, and creates a feeling of home for them and all visitors. The Walkway is designed to support and embrace the existing memorials, not to conflict or further fragment them.

*Story Stones* - Minnesota soldiers hail from each of the state's 87 counties. To create broad participation and a sense of ownership of the memorial, each of the 87 counties will contribute one large stone to the site, possessing the geological character of their landscape and representing their home. These stones will be placed in an accessible field of compacted crushed stone. Arranged into clusters of nine northern hemisphere constellations, these stones serve as a unique visual connection between loved ones that are deployed, their families at home and the shared stars of the night sky. Letters sent to soldiers from home are laser etched onto these stones, and provide a window into the lives of our military families and their sacrifices, as well as imparting a strong educational component. As the visitor walks through the field of stones, an etched story, curated from each county allows them to reflect on the unique emotional journeys of all military families.

*Gold Star Table* - At the west end of The Walkway, the Gold Star Table recognizes the supreme sacrifice of our Gold Star Families. The garden features an enduring bronze table to represent many narratives. It recalls the tables that we gather at as a family to share dinner, stories and laughter. It is a place of gathering, reflection and recreating memories. The table also has an element of transcendence, suggesting that one day these families will be reunited. A five-point foundation with a polished surface supports the table and signifies the gold star. Northern hemisphere constellations shine through the table's surface, allowing light to pass through and creating a guide to the night sky. Polaris, the North Star is emphasized, a constant navigational guide home, and refers to our State's motto L'Étoile du Nord, The Star of the North. Visitors can come to the table to express gratitude for Gold Star Families through thought, word or deed.

## **MFT: What pieces of the Tribute are you most excited to see come to life?**

**Lee:** For the MFT I believe that no part is greater than the whole. So for me I feel that to truly understand the supreme sacrifices that our military families endure I am most excited to see it in its entirety. I will feel great pleasure and satisfaction when the Tribute experiences its first Memorial Day celebration and service member redeployment ceremony.

*\*Final design concept is subject to the approval of the MNCAP Board.*

# MFT VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

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# NEWS & EVENTS

## Founding Sponsors

The Minnesota Military Family Tribute is honored to call **Davisco**, **Federated Insurance**, **POPP Communications**, **Starkey Hearing Foundation** and **Wells Fargo** *Founding Partners* of the Minnesota Military Family Tribute. Each of these organizations has donated \$100,000 for the Tribute, setting the stage for a successful endeavor. The leadership of the MFT is profoundly thankful for the generosity of these organizations.



## Media Sponsors

Telling the story of the Minnesota Military Family Tribute is integral to the success of our efforts to establish the Tribute.



The story would not be told without the help of our Founding Media Sponsors: CBS, Clear Channel and the Minnesota Timberwolves. Due to their support, we were able to secure the Founding Partners by offering on-air recognition for their generous donations.



## GIVE TO THE MAX DAY Thursday, November 14<sup>th</sup>!

Last year, the MFT raised nearly \$40,000 during Give to the Max Day 2012, including a generous matching donation from Megan and Dennis Doyle and Welsh Cos.

Help us meet our goal this November when the MFT again participates in Give to the Max Day on November 14<sup>th</sup>.

You can donate at GiveMN.org, or on the MFT website at MilitaryFamilyTribute.com

