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**Gold Star Families now eligible for OCP military appreciation benefit**

*Individuals can pick up vouchers for a free campground, ORV or waterpark visit*

**OAKLAND COUNTY, MI – Sept. 30, 2024** – Oakland County Parks (OCP) is immediately expanding its military recreation voucher program to include Gold Star Families, those who have experienced the loss of an immediate family member who died during active-duty military service.

Oakland County Commissioner Michael Spisz (R-Oxford Township) requested the new benefit be created after being contacted by a constituent, Stephen Martin of Oakland Township. Martin was pleased to hear about the decision to expand recreation voucher benefits to Gold Star Families. His brother, Michael D. Martin, died shortly after completing basic training in 1983 while serving in the United States Navy.

“He joined because first, he wanted to serve his country and second because he was looking forward to a career in the Navy,” Martin said. “He was 24 years old and was my oldest brother and best friend.”

Spisz said he is very proud to see Oakland County Parks honor the Martin family and all those who have given the ultimate sacrifice for this great country.

“Our parks are beautiful and a great place for everyone to experience including our Gold Star Families,” said Spisz.

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission unanimously approved the measure at its Aug. 7 meeting. The vouchers are available to all Gold Star Families who live in Oakland County.

“Oakland County Parks is the first county park, to my knowledge, to extend this benefit to and recognize Gold Star Families in this way,” Matthew Mogle, Public Affairs Officer, Naval Station Great Lakes, said. “Gold Star Families often hear, ‘Thank you for your service,’ or ‘Thank you for your service member’s service.’ While these sentiments are meaningful, what is also

meaningful is for a government organization to solidify that gratitude in a policy such as this one.”

Martin appreciates that he will be able to receive a recreation voucher in recognition of Michael’s service.

“It warms my soul,” he said. “It means a lot to have this in his honor.”

Recreation vouchers are distributed each May in honor of National Military Appreciation Month and expire the current year. However, Gold Star Families may pick up recreation vouchers immediately, which will be valid through Dec. 31, 2025 for one of the following:

- One free night at a campsite at either Addison Oaks County Park near Rochester or Groveland Oaks County Park in Holly
- One free visit to Red Oaks Waterpark in Madison Heights or Waterford Oaks Wave Pool in Waterford
- One free entry to Holly Oaks ORV Park

“We are pleased to be able to add Gold Star Families as eligible recipients of the Military Appreciation voucher and provide them with opportunities for outdoor recreation in their own backyard,” Parks Director Chris Ward said. “It’s our way of recognizing the ultimate sacrifice they made. While we can never fill the void left by their loved one’s loss, we can show our appreciation and gratitude for their service.”

Mogle said it is important to recognize surviving family members to honor both their sacrifice and the ultimate sacrifice their loved ones have made.

“Every service member who raises his or her hand and dedicates themselves to our freedom should be able to do so knowing that, should the worst happen, those they hold dear will be cared for by their branch’s Gold Star Program,” he said.

In 2022, the National Parks Service announced that Gold Star Families would be eligible for a lifetime military service pass that provides the holder with access to national parklands and wildlife refuges. Martin hopes that the Oakland County Parks initiative will lead to a “domino effect” where state and other local park systems consider including Gold Star Families in their plans as well.

“We hope Gold Star Families will be able to use the vouchers to do everything from spend time in quiet reflection remembering their service member, bringing children that miss their parents to enjoy playgrounds, to planning family gatherings where both past memories are shared and new ones are created,” said Mogle.

Gold Star Families must show proof of residency when they pick up their voucher during the hours stated below at one of the following locations:

- Addison Oaks County Park, 1480 West Romeo Road, Leonard

- 8:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday- Sunday, staff permitting. Please call 248-693-2432 to check that staff is available
- Holly Oaks ORV Park, 14551 Shields Road, Holly
  - 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
- Independence Oaks County Park, 9501 Sashabaw Road, Clarkston
  - 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the contact station; 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday at the park office
- Lyon Oaks County Park, 52221 Pontiac Trail, Wixom
  - 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the dog park
- Waterford Oaks County Park, 2800 Watkins Lake Road in Waterford
  - 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday at the Recreation Program & Services Office

The Department of Defense defines immediate family members as spouses, parents, children, siblings, stepparents, stepchildren, step-siblings, half-siblings, adoptive parents, adopted children and adopted siblings.

Information about the 2025 Military Appreciation voucher program for active military and veterans will be released in the spring. Call 248-858-0916 for more information.

For more information about Oakland County Parks, visit [OaklandCountyParks.com](https://OaklandCountyParks.com). Join the conversation on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).