

Ginny and Jack Luther, parents of Army Lt. Robert "Bart" Fletcher, close their eyes as they listen to the playing of taps during the launching of the Blue Star Awards in Stuart's City Hall on Tuesday. The soldiers' families were presented the awards from Alan Weierman, U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, Karen Sweeney, and Lt. Eric Gelbman.

PHOTOS BY GUY KITCHENS/SPECIAL TO TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS



Blue Star awards recognize Treasure Coast service members' sacrifice

By Kim Hughes

Special to Treasure Coast Newspapers

STUART — Although the awards two local families received won't fill the void created by their sons' deaths, it might help begin the healing process.

In a ceremony at Stuart City Hall on Tuesday, Army Lt. Robert "Bart" Fletcher and Navy Petty Officer Second Class Brendon Sandburg were recognized for giving their lives for their country. While both died serving in the military, no congressional award was given because their deaths were not a result of combat with the enemy.

Alan Weierman, who operates the Southeastern Military Academy in Port St. Lucie, created the Blue Star Awards after learning the Luthers had attended a Memorial Day event expecting their son, Fletcher, to be recognized, but he was not.

On Tuesday, Fletcher and Sandburg, the first two Blue Star award recipients, and their families, were honored.

In welcoming attendees, Weierman said, "We have gathered today to pay respect and homage to two of America's greatest heroes."

Despite the circumstances under which both young men died, Weierman explained, "The sacrifice is the same, the heartache is the same, the missing is the same."

Parents received a medal engraved with "In valor there is hope," a certificate and an American flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney, who helped present the awards, has been supportive of Weierman's efforts.

"On behalf of my district, we



U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney presents Ginny and Jack Luther, parents of Lt. Robert "Bart" Fletcher, with an award.



A large crowd fills the Stuart City Council Chambers and watches the launching of the Blue Star Awards on Tuesday.

wanted to show their service and their sacrifice and their parents' sacrifice did not go unnoticed," he said.

Ginny Luther said the recognition "brings much closure to

us. I'm overwhelmed with tears of joy."

The medal will have a place of honor in a memorial in their home dedicated to their son.

"We're on a journey," Jack

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Luther said. "This has just given us an affirmation that we're on the right path."

He hopes the awards will be used as "a springboard to heal the hearts of others."

The Sandburgs were both grateful their son Brendon was included in the ceremony.

"Our biggest fear is that he's going to be forgotten," Kathi Sandburg said. "He's our hero."

Gene Sandburg appreciated the steps Weierman has taken to ensure that Brendon and others are acknowledged.

"We, the family, always remember Brendon, but you always worry the community will forget," Sandburg said. "This is proof positive the community remembers."