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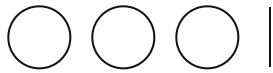


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## The Folded Flag Foundation helps Missouri City Gold Star family

Tracy Maness, Staff writer

Updated: July 12, 2021 11:31 a.m.



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Missouri City resident Cierra Becker is a certified firefighter and emergency medical technician who has benefited from scholarships from The Folded Flag Foundation.

Courtesy photo

Killed in action in Iraq in 2007, Army Staff Sgt. Shane Robert Becker left behind two young daughters and a widow.

The Folded Flag Foundation, a Las Vegas-based nonprofit, has supported the Missouri City Gold Star family through scholarships and support grants.

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Shane joined the Army as a young man, served and was discharged in 1994. Later compelled by the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, he re-enlisted. Crystal Becker said

her husband wanted to fight for a better world for his nearly 2-year-old daughter Cierra. He also felt a call to be a leader for the younger men he knew would be joining the Army. Some people didn't really understand the decision, but Crystal said a person must follow their own path.

"We have to do what each of us, I feel, independently can do for the greater good, whatever that might be," Crystal explained. "And I think that, yes, as patriotic as he was, a lot of it was he had a little girl, and he couldn't not go off and try to protect her future"

A few years later, Cheyenna was just shy of 2 months old when her dad died. Cierra is now 21. Cheyenna is 14. Their mom says they take their education seriously and have been greatly helped by Folded Flag, which is currently preparing to send out 678 checks valued at more than \$3 million to spouses and children.

The foundation was started in 2014 by Bill Foley. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and watched half of his graduating class die in Vietnam, with little assistance available for families picking up the pieces. Foundation spokesperson Jennifer Ramieh said after that, Foley carried a long-held desire to help through education.

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“We think that education is kind of the cornerstone or bedrock of finding a new path forward after the loss of either a parent or a spouse,” said Ramieh. “... So this is an opportunity for us to provide kind of the solid foundation for them to get their footing and move forward with a new path.”

Since its beginning, Folded Flag has provided more than 1,700 scholarships and support grants valued at nearly \$11 million, according to Ramieh. She said even though the largest annual fundraiser was canceled last year due to the pandemic, the foundation is giving out more money for the 2021-22 school year than it ever has before.

The scholarships and grants support educational needs for spouses of all ages and children up to 26 years old, from kindergarten to graduate school. Ramieh said the average spouse that applies makes less than \$50,000 a year and supports two children, so the financial assistance is valuable and important.

Ramieh hears from people the foundation has helped. One recently sent a college graduation announcement with a thank-you note saying she is leaving college debt-free. She plans to attend Columbia University for graduate school with additional help.

Today, Cierra is a certified firefighter and emergency medical technician who is pursuing a bachelor's in emergency services. Folded Flag helped her with some high

school courses and at the fire academy. Cheyenna, now a ninth grader, has used the funds for gymnastics classes and is currently enrolled in a summer theater program. She hopes to be a police officer someday. Crystal said if she had to pay for the programs the foundation has covered for her daughters, she would have to work so much that she couldn't be present with them.

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Scholarship and grant recipients include family members coping after suicides caused by military service-related post-traumatic stress disorder. Ramieh said the foundation has seen an increase in those families reaching out. This year, 18 percent of applicants came from PTSD-related suicides, up 2 percent from last year.

Crystal is grateful for how The Folded Flag Foundation has helped and has found some solace there.

"It brings you hope that no matter how much we may disagree in the big world or whatever, that down underneath, we all are compassionate and want one another to do well and to be better and to grow," she said.

Scholarships and support grants for the 2021-22 school year have closed. The application process starts each year in the spring.

The foundation is funded through public and corporate donations. Ramieh said because corporate underwriters cover administrative costs, 100 percent of donations go directly into scholarships and support grants.

To learn more or to donate, visit [www.foldedflagfoundation.org](http://www.foldedflagfoundation.org).

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Written By

**Tracy Maness**

Reach Tracy on

Tracy was born and raised in southwest Houston. Although she has left the Bayou City several times for different reasons, she has somehow always found her way back. She graduated from Houston Baptist University some years back and is now a reporter for "The Katy Rancher," covering everything from education to features to local businesses and governments.

Special areas of interest include mental health issues, education, nonprofits and anything that is helpful to read and might make a difference. Tracy enjoys meaningful conversations over Tex-Mex or good coffee, camping and spending time with her husband and two dogs at their home in Katy.

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7/12/2021

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