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In Memory of Stephen Carroll Cookson

APRIL 30TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Stephen Carroll Cookson, educator and public servant, passed away surrounded by loved ones on April 28, 2025, at the age of 66. Born June 26, 1958 in Dallas, Texas to Carroll and Rozelle Cookson, the family moved to Advance in 1966. Steve later settled in Poplar Bluff, Missouri with his wife Joy where he touched many lives through his dedication to education and public service.

Steve's academic achievements began with his graduation with honors from Advance High School in 1976, earning degrees from Three Rivers Community College in 1978, College of the Ozarks in 1980, and Southeast Missouri State. He dedicated his professional life to education as a teacher and coach at several schools including Washburn, Puxico, South Iron, Dyersburg TN, and East Carter County. He later took on leadership roles as Principal at Doniphan and Norwood, eventually serving as Superintendent of Naylor Schools where he received the Missouri "New Superintendent of the Year" award from MASA. As chairman of the Three Rivers Community College Board of Trustees, he spearheaded a major scholarship program benefiting students of the region. Steve also served on the board of the Missouri Association of Rural Education, MSHSAA Administrative Advisory Committee, the state Beta Clubs Administrative Council, and the College of the Ozarks Alumni board.

Steve's commitment to education extended beyond the classroom as he served in the Missouri State Legislature representing District 153 from 2010 to 2018. Recognizing the integral role that small schools play in rural communities, he sat on the Joint Committee on Education, and served

as Chair of both the Elementary and Secondary Education committee and the Higher Education committee, working tirelessly for the improvement of educational standards and funding in the state.

Steve's other Missouri legislative and civic contributions were immense. He sat on several committees advocating for rural communities, including Children and Families, Tourism and Natural Resources, Transportation, and Trade and Tourism. He led his legislative colleagues as the Vice Chair of the Missouri Sportsmen's Caucus and was a member of the National Rifle association, National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Missouri Farm Bureau, Missouri Retired Teachers Association, and the Ripley County Retired Teachers Association.

Steve was also an active member of the Church of Christ. His faith guided his life and work, including his advocacy for organ donation through Donate Life. As an organ transplant recipient himself, he worked diligently to sponsor and pass legislation that supported this cause, leaving a lasting legacy of generosity and hope.

Steve was known for his adventurous spirit, often exploring the Ozarks and discovering new paths way off the beaten track. An avid outdoorsman, he found joy in the natural beauty surrounding him. He revered the Ozarks above all and cared deeply about preserving Missouri cultural traditions. He apprenticed under master artist Cecil Murray building wooden river John boats and hand carving sassafras paddles for the National Park Service, carrying on an art form that is now rare but vital to Ozark riverways heritage.

A standout athlete, Steve was a proud member of the 1975 Advance State Champion Basketball Team coached by his father. He later played for legendary Coach Gene Bess as a member of the Three Rivers Raiders team that placed third in the nation in 1978. His passion for basketball continued throughout his life. He could often be spotted at games with family members supporting various local teams, most recently following the Bernie Mules and cheering on #15.

He is survived by his wife, Joy Cookson; his son, Tyler (Molly) Cookson, his sisters Lesa (Jon) Murray and Lorie (Don) Grossheider; uncle Ronnie (Dee) Cookson; nieces and nephews Kyle (Amber) Murray, Katie (Philip) Klaproth, Clint Daniel Pogue Abby (Cyle) Huck and Neal (Kori) Grossheider; cousins Karen (Roger) Brown, Janell Hill, Jeff (Debbie) Ridenour, Cliff (Tom) Ridenour, Julie Ridenour, Jay Cookson, Brad (Christie) Cookson, Bruce (Karen) Underwood, Gary (Marie) Underwood. Preceding him in death are his parents Carroll and Rozelle Cookson;

uncles and aunts J.T. (Phyllis) Cookson, Ancel (Doris) Cookson, Rena Mable (Quentin) Ridenour; and cousins, Joey Cookson and Linda Jorgensen.

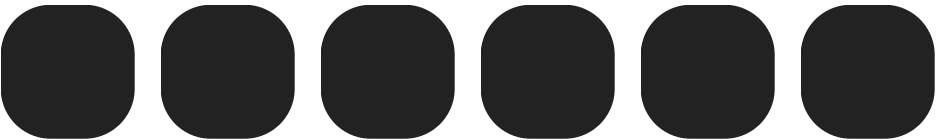
Steve’s memory will live on in the hearts of those who knew him, as a man of integrity, kindness, and unwavering dedication to his family, community, state and faith.

Visitation will be held on Saturday, May 3, 2025, from 5:00-8:00 PM at Morgan Funeral Chapel in Advance, MO. A funeral service and interment will be held on Sunday, May 4, 2025, at 2:00 PM at the Brown General Baptist Church north of Puxico on Country Road 275. Memorial may be made to Donate Life America.

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