



Garth Alexander Cooley

June 27, 1967 - March 2, 2025

Grandmaster Garth Alexander Cooley

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And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

On Sunday morning, March 2nd, Garth went home to be with our Lord. When he took his last breath on earth, he was doing what he loved – training in taekwondo alongside his dear friend of 40 years, Grandmaster Don Cottee. He departed this world wearing his dobok, which if God gave any of us the choice on what we will be wearing when we pass... that's exactly what Grandmaster Cooley would have picked out. While we are still trying to grasp the suddenness of his passing, our comfort is in knowing he is with the Lord, and now reunited with his beloved Mom, Dolly and his dear Grandma Millie. It's incredibly hard to put into words the indelible mark he made on countless lives in his 57 years, and this tribute could never begin to summarize his impact. But, it was at the young age of 13 years old when Garth discovered his passion, and God set him on his life's mission. Garth began taekwondo shortly after moving to Indianapolis with his Mom, brother and sister when he faced bullying at his new school. His Mom signed Garth up for taekwondo with Grandmaster Chul Koo Yoon. His journey officially began. What started off as a plan to learn self-defense, quickly turned into a lifelong mission to reach the

maximum potential not just in himself, but in the lives of literally thousands. Grandmaster Cooley would be the first to humbly admit, he was not coordinated as a kid. In fact, quite the opposite. He was awkward, and believe it or not, even wore corrective orthotics as a child. But his determination to overcome every challenge he faced was greater than any obstacle. Put simply, the word “quit” was never in his vocabulary. This self-described “uncoordinated” kid would go on to achieve incredible accomplishments as a high level taekwondo athlete. Grandmaster Cooley was a two-time US National Champion, US Taekwondo Team Captain, Bronze Medalist in the Goodwill Games, World Taekwondo Championships, Pan Am Games, and even named athlete of the year by the US Olympic Committee. When it was time to retire from sparring, Grandmaster Cooley redirected his competitive spirit towards national and international poomsae (forms) competitions. Alongside his amazing team – Master George, and Grandmasters Turgeon, Southwick and Cottee – he would go on to win the gold many times in the teams, pair, and individual divisions, something he loved doing since 2006. While he was looking forward to the future competing in the next age bracket at 60 (or what he jokingly called the “old guy” division), he was still determined to beat the “young” guys in the 50-59 age group in a couple of months in Salt Lake City. He never stopped giving his best. Even as we approached our empty nester years, he decided to follow in his Mom’s footsteps and get his real estate license. He enjoyed serving his friends and all of his clients as a realtor for five years.

No question, his personal achievements and accomplishments were quite incredible. But while sport taekwondo fueled his competitive spirit, Grandmaster Cooley’s real passion – what really drove him – was helping to bring out the best in his students, coaches, and the instructors he was blessed to lead. Taekwondo was the vehicle God gave him to do that. Grandmaster Yoon, who was not just a mentor but also a second father, bestowed the greatest honor to Grandmaster Cooley by trusting him to take over KTA in 1996. And while he was privileged to coach and train so many great athletes

and see them achieve success, it was the small ways in which he knew he could make a big impact on his students that brought him the most joy. He would come home so happy sharing stories after “report card checks” when he saw grades go from below average to As and Bs. And how many remember being told, “if you don’t behave at home, you can’t come to taekwondo because that’s not how (insert rank) belts behave!?” Then, there were the countless tests where one or more students were struggling to break their boards. He had a way to encouraging you to do it – (or making kids think they were going to kick his hand practicing – and instead he’d quickly put the board in place of his hand – and they’d break! Tears turned into sheer joy, because he never let anyone give up. And, how many parents over the years came to KTA, looking to sign up their kids, then ended up turning taekwondo into an entire family activity? Then, there were adult students who walked into KTA thinking, “I might not be able to physically do this, but I’ll try.” Not only did they earn their black belt, so many went on to advance even further. And of course, how many marriages happened because you met the love of your life at KTA? Ok, I guess I’ll be the first to thankfully raise my hand. 😊 There are just too many amazing stories to list, and yet every single one is why Grandmaster Cooley loved what he did. And when we say he loved KTA... KTA is you. That is why Grant, Jill and I could not be more grateful knowing that the legacy Garth built at KTA will continue thanks to the extraordinary team he’s led for decades. This is an answer to our prayers. Our incredible team of Grandmasters, Masters, and Black Belt instructors stand alongside the Bickels to lead, grow, and mentor the next generation of outstanding students and bring out the very best in every student. Our heartfelt thanks and love to all of you.

Finally, as hard as it’s been to put into words the way in which God used Garth’s gifts in all the lives of this remarkable taekwondo community, it’s even harder to sum up what he meant to our friends outside of KTA, and of course our family. Several of you became our close friends because of KTA... Some,

he 'inherited' through marriage... and many of you because we were blessed to go to the same church or live in the same neighborhood. He loved every one of you. You have been, and continue to be a source of love, support and priceless memories that we treasure. To our Legacy Crew – which started off as the monthly neighborhood euchre group – and Founders - thank you for being our “Family”. What a blessed 12 years it's been full of laughs, antics, awesome friendships... ok, and more silly antics. In fact, it was fitting that the night before he passed, Garth came in first place at our euchre tournament and then won our progressive jackpot. He loved our Legacy crew time together – and especially that night when he won what was akin to a gold medal, but in euchre.

Indeed he leaves behind an incredible legacy, and it carries on through Grant and Jill. Their lights shined the brightest in his life. When both asked to train in taekwondo, he waited until they had asked about 3 or 4 times. Why? Because he wanted them to both understand that once you make a commitment to get your black belt, you follow through with it. Sound familiar? As so many can relate, there were definitely days neither one wanted to go to class. But, he knew there was a greater life lesson in not giving up, and finishing strong. Grant and Jill ended up exceeding even their own expectations, and chose to keep training after 1st Dan. The special moments of tying on their new black belts after they earned their first and second Dans were definite tear jerkers for both of us. Those were some of the countless incredible memories we shared as a family. We will also cherish our fierce competitions at Wii golf (and Wii everything), Life board games, watching movies (especially Happy Gilmore), enjoying vacations and cruises, or just having family dinners together. Garth would also say teaching the kids how to clean, vacuum and do laundry together were special moments for him.... He called it “Camp Dad”. Garth was the pioneer of Dad jokes, a Star Wars expert, 80s music king, and movie line aficionado. Even at 27 and 23 years old, he could still make all of us laugh with the same movie line he'd quote for the umpteenth time. He loved being in the front row at all the cross country and track meets, musicals,

plays, Father-Daughter dances, graduations, Father-Son amusement park trips, or just hanging out together talking.

While we assumed he'd be there for Grant's graduation from law school this May, Jill's graduation from the School of Social Work next fall, and the vacations we were planning as we got closer to retirement, we are so thankful for the time we had together. We loved him so much.

Garth is also deeply missed by his Dad, Ronald Cooley, brother Adam (Dawn), sister Felicia, Uncle John and Aunt Paula, Aunt Toni, Uncle Bob, and so many wonderful cousins JJ (Becky), Tom (Stacy), Tatum (Eric), Adrienne, and more.

He was blessed to have another Dad in his life, his father in law, euchre partner, and occasionally euchre coach, who loved him like a son, Richard Jerman (Barb). His sister-in-law Jennifer, brother-in-law Jeff, Uncle Bill and Aunt Joy, Uncle John (Darlene), Aunt Mary Kay (Bill), and cousins Billy, Ben, Rob (Kim), John, Melissa (Chris), Nancy, Anne (Karl) and Amy will also miss him dearly.

A Celebration of Life will be held Saturday, May 3, 2025 at 11 a.m. at IMMI, 18880 North East Street, Westfield, IN 46074, with visitation from 10:00 a.m. until the time of service. In his memory, we simply ask you continue to live your life giving your best, and never giving up when you set out to achieve your goals.

One of Garth's favorite Bible verses was Romans 8:28. Garth loved the Lord. And he knew the purpose God called on his life. That's why despite the fact that we feel he left us too soon, we know God's plan is good, and we find comfort knowing we will be reunited with him someday when we also take our last breath on earth, and our first one in heaven.

God Bless you all.

Tribute Wall



“ We will always be grateful to Grandmaster Cooley. 4/5ths of our family earned our black belts at KTA under his instruction. He was not just a teacher and mentor, but he was a friend. Thank you for pouring into us as students and leaders. We will continue to work hard and honor you well, sir. Thanks to your share faith in Christ, we know this is not “good bye” but see you “later.” Rest easy, Kwan Jang Nim. The Norman family



Amy Norman - December 29, 2025 at 11:37 PM

KF

“ Kyongwon Ahn, Hamilton & Kim Families purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.



Kyongwon Ahn, Hamilton & Kim Families - May 01, 2025 at 09:07 AM

TF

“ The Williams Family purchased the Sweet Snacks Gift Crate for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.



The Williams Family - April 29, 2025 at 08:55 PM

AR

“ *I have just learned abt this, my son vince was involved in kta and worked for master cooley for 1 summer. Garth was simply awesome*

annette roddy - April 15, 2025 at 03:00 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.*



April 15, 2025 at 10:12 AM

KJ

“ *The Johnson family is heartbroken over the sudden passing of Grandmaster Cooley. For the past six years, we have been incredibly blessed to know him—not only as a teacher but as a mentor and a cherished friend. His impact on our lives, especially on Caleb, Lizzie, and Ben, goes far beyond Tae Kwon Do.*

Grandmaster Cooley didn't just guide our children toward earning their black belts—he instilled in them resilience, discipline, and the courage to push through adversity. He taught them to respect authority, to believe in themselves, and to find joy in the journey. He led with passion, kindness, and unwavering dedication, shaping not only skilled martial artists but strong and confident young people.

Our hearts ache at the loss of such a remarkable man, yet we find comfort in knowing he is now with Jesus. Grandmaster Cooley, you were a true gift to our family and to so many others. Your legacy of strength, wisdom, and love will live on in all the lives you touched.

You will be profoundly missed, GMC. Thank you for everything.



Kevin and Claire Johnson - March 24, 2025 at 08:23 AM

“ To Julie, Grant and Jillian,

We are so sorry for your loss. To lose a husband and father is devastating. My hope is that in time, the pain of loss fades and the memories of love and laughter that cause you smile present themselves often. He was a wonderful human being.

When Beni and I started in mid 1990s (we are one of the many "met at KTA" married couples-I thankfully raise my hand) we were always so excited for test time to come around. To see Mister Cooley and Mister Latimer go through their test material was incredible. What a phenomenal way for us color belts to see the material we were being taught with so much speed, precision and passion. Those early tests were amazing to witness.

As Mister became Master and Master became Grand Master (GM) Cooley, his attitude, compassion, encouragement, and instruction never changed. GM Cooley was ALWAYS trying to make you better than you thought you could be. From across the dojang, he would notice a slight improvement in your back kick on the bag or he would correct a misaligned outerblock from a form. A gifted teacher, wanting you to do your best, guiding you.

When our son Ben joined in 2012, I knew that he would have the same great coaching from GM Cooley that we had received so many years before. Ben started with "I don't want to go" and tearful tests, while being encouraged by GM Cooley to keep trying and keep improving. Ben finally took the message to heart and grew stronger with lots of practice and lots of pushing from GM Cooley.

With GM Cooley's passing, we have lost a great teacher and a great friend. The amount of influence he has had on me and my family is immeasurable.

I truly wish I would have told him more often.

Thank you for so much.

Russ Kipp - March 16, 2025 at 10:09 AM



“ *Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.*



March 14, 2025 at 09:09 PM



“ *I'm so sorry to hear of Grandmaster Cooley's passing. He touched so many people. He was great with our daughter when she started taking lessons when she was in high school around 2012. She stayed and worked up to 2nd Dan Blackbelt. He was a wonderful advocate for the sport and in helping his students learn how it not only helped with fitness and self defense, but lessons on handling life in general. Thoughts and prayers to all his family and friends.... He will be greatly missed!*



Karen Spears Cronkhite

Karen Spears Cronkhite - March 13, 2025 at 09:36 PM



“ *I have known Master Cooley since before he became Master Cooley then grandmaster Cooley, and have known him since then. What a shock to hear the news! Never could I have imagined! Thank you Sir, for being my instructor my coach my friend, and my mentor for over 30 yrs. ❤️ ❤️*

Charles Willis - March 13, 2025 at 09:21 PM

TW

“ Grandmaster Cooley certainly left the world a better place because he was present among our lives. As each of us continue to grow, along with each tree planted in his honor, his memory will live on. We are blessed to have known him and been influenced by him. We are among many who will miss his voice, his challenges, and his light.
- the Westerfields



The Westerfields - March 13, 2025 at 07:40 PM

WW

“ Wendy W. planted a grove of 3 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Garth Alexander Cooley.

Wendy W. - March 13, 2025 at 07:32 PM

GW

“ Georgeanna W. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Garth Alexander Cooley.

Georgeanna W. - March 13, 2025 at 06:13 PM

MD

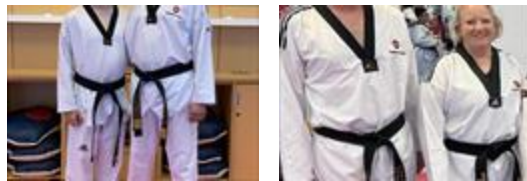
“ Grandmaster Cooley, I will always remember your kindness.



Mimi Drake - March 13, 2025 at 03:34 PM

MG

“ Grandmaster Cooley was so much more than a Taekwondo instructor, coach, mentor and friend; he was more like family. I met him at KTA in 1987 and had no idea at the time what an impact he would have on my life. He lived his life leading by example. If you wanted to be coddled, he was not the one to go to, but if you wanted honesty, goal setting and growth, he was the man for the job! GM Cooley meant so much to our KTA family, as well as to my actual family. My son looked to him as his role model always striving to make him proud. GM Cooley got us through some really rough times: 9/11, COVID, untimely deaths of KTA students, as well as personal stress, injuries and losses. He seemed to have wisdom beyond his years and always knew what to say. So getting through this is extra difficult since we don't have his help. What we do have is his spirit and we know, without a doubt, that he would want KTA to go on, to continue his legacy. It's the least we can do for him. ❤️



Master Cindy Gould - March 13, 2025 at 02:05 PM

AJ

“ Akane J. planted a grove of 5 [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Garth Alexander Cooley.

Akane J. - March 13, 2025 at 01:43 PM

DO

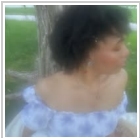
“ Grandmaster Cooley was apart of my life since I was 7. From a young age he pushed me to be the best I possibly could, to never give up and to work hard. He made one of the biggest positive impacts of my life and never gave up on me. He truly loved all students and showed it through infinite support and guidance.

It is hard to hear about his passing and my heart goes out to his family.

Until we meet again, Grandmaster Cooley. May you rest in peace and your legacy live on through us all.



Destany Garcia Ortiz - March 13, 2025 at 12:41 PM



“ My condolences to the family of Grandmaster Cooley.

He was truly a wonderful leader and changed my life. Not only from learning the skill of Taekwondo but he taught disciple, the importance of challenging yourself, being there for others, respecting others and yourself. He was clearly passionate in his work and I have no doubt that he was a positive influence to others like he was to me. Rest in peace Grandmaster Cooley.



Ryan Smith - March 13, 2025 at 11:37 AM

DC

“ Grandmaster Cooley was such a light for my family during a challenging time. My father had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and was seeking out ways to connect and build precious memories as he prepared for a tough mental and physical battle. He, myself, my brother and my daughter joined KTA and had an amazing experience growing and learning together. Naya started at 5 yrs old and quickly realized the strength she held and still channels it often in other aspects of her life. My father passed but he cherished those moments of remembering his strength and helping him to find a peace. Even after his passing my brother Alexis and Naya continued their practice until we moved out of state but even then Grandmaster Cooley stayed in touch checking in on us. His presence will be greatly missed but his memory will live on in all the lives he touched. Love the Cureton Family 💜

Dominique Cureton - March 13, 2025 at 11:35 AM

KK

“ KTA Family: CHERYL A KALANOC. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Garth Alexander Cooley.

KTA Family: CHERYL A KALANOC. - March 09, 2025 at 09:13 PM

KK

“ KTA Family: CHERYL A KALANOC. purchased the Blue and Yellow Orchid Mix (Silk Cemetery Flowers) for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.



KTA Family: CHERYL A KALANOC. - March 09, 2025 at 09:13 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.*



March 09, 2025 at 10:46 AM



“ *KATA has been a great help and support for my two children. We have met wonderful people and have formed a second family at KTA. Thank you GM Cooley, you will live in our hearts..fam Hidalgo Reyes*

Blanca Reyes - March 08, 2025 at 11:12 PM



“ *My deepest gratitude to Grandmaster Cooley for being a mentor and role model. Your work ethic and integrity and passion for the sport have left an indelible mark on our lives. Thank you for being a constant guide to my son by always inspiring him to do his best. We will always remember you with great affection. Odreman family*



Lucy Odreman Castellanos - March 08, 2025 at 08:29 PM

DK

My deepest sympathies for the family, friends, instructors, and students on the loss of a great man. I was honored to have known Master Cooley through our many years of competitions and training sessions. I was also honored to serve as his Vice President to the State of Indiana in the USTU days. What an impact our group made for the State under his Leadership. His impact on the TKD community is obvious. His spirit will live on, and his legacy will burn bright in the hearts of those who knew him.

*God Bless his memory.
Sincerely...Master Dan Kocsis*

Daniel Kocsis - March 09, 2025 at 11:32 AM

GB

I have so many memories of Grandmaster Garth Cooley that I don't even know where to start. Perhaps in 1985 when I joined KTA as a tiny kid and he was a teenager. Or maybe in 1996 when I returned to finish my black belt course and he began training me for competition as well. He was such an influential person during my tumultuous college years. He was a voice of reason and calm and I knew that if I was having a bad day, I could just go to class at KTA and everything would be OK. It's been many years since I've been at KTA, but his influence has never been far from my life. I still teach Cardio Kickboxing today because of him. I extend my deepest, deepest condolences to his family and close friends for his devastating and sudden departure. May God always bless. I will always remember him so fondly.

*Sincerely,
Gina Buselli*

Gina Buselli - March 12, 2025 at 01:31 PM

MK

“ I joined Korea Taekwondo Academy (KTA) in 2000—he was pivotal in not only laying the foundation of my internationally competitive career, but also gave me the confidence to eventually conquer the extreme social anxiety I used to have as a kid. He believed in me, and helped me develop into the person I am today.

My prayers and deepest condolences go out to Grandmaster Cooley's immediate family and the KTA family ❤️

Maia Kirk - March 08, 2025 at 03:34 PM



“ *This little guy is 20 now and would not be the man he is today without the guidance and love that Grandmaster Cooley gave him over the last 14 years. He was a part of our family and we are heartbroken for your loss. Many prayers to you as you navigate this terrible loss.*



Jennifer Gries - March 08, 2025 at 03:16 PM

SS

“ *I met Garth through real estate. We laughed and shared stories of our clients. He was a remarkable man. Such a blessing to so many.*

Sheryl Smith - March 08, 2025 at 01:47 PM

FL

“ *From Abby Lee planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Garth Alexander Cooley.*

From Abby Lee - March 08, 2025 at 01:29 PM

FL

“ *From Abby Lee purchased the Full Of Love Bouquet for the family of Garth Alexander Cooley.*



From Abby Lee - March 08, 2025 at 01:29 PM

KH

“ We are so deeply sorry for your loss. We are grateful for Grandmaster Cooley and the guidance and support he gave Lucas from the beginning of his TKD journey to his 2nd Dan years ago. KTA was a warm and welcoming place that became our second home for many years. Lucas and I both saw GM Cooley separately within this past year. He was so excited to share his family’s accomplishments over the past several years, and we caught up like no time had passed.

We are holding your family and everyone who loved him close to our hearts.

Ross Merkel, Kim, Lucas and Max Hoffman

Kimberly Hoffman - March 08, 2025 at 12:11 PM