



Wm. Thomas "Tom" Cockley

December 8, 1950 - June 14, 2020

Frankfort resident William Thomas Cockley (known affectionately as Tom), died Sunday, June 14th 2020 at the age of 69.

The son of Rosemary Seidell Chandler and William Cockley, Tom grew up the eldest of six brothers in Rockville, Maryland. By the time he graduated high school, Tom had already become a world-class gymnast and discovered his passion for teaching. Tom received his Master's degree in Physical Education from the University of Maryland (1977-80), and credits his experience with the Gymkhana program for inspiring his teaching philosophy. He then went on to Jacksonville State University (1981-88) as an assistant professor before pursuing his PhD Professional Preparation from Florida State (1988-93), earning him the impressive title of Dr. Cockley, although he always preferred Coach.

In 1992, Tom joined the faculty at Kentucky State University, where he would stay for the next 20 years. Amongst numerous other achievements, Tom established Gymkhana programs at both JSU and KSU. Tom's coaching philosophy was one of inclusion, nuance, and support, believing that every individual interaction was a "teachable moment" and that all students could achieve success. Considered a disadvantaged student himself, Tom led first by example, always employing empathy and personal discipline to inspire and lead. A loyal servant to his community, he was a member of The Frankfort

Rotary Club and served as Community Service Chair. He brought the NYSP Summer Program to Frankfort and served as Program Administrator for 6 years. He was also an active member on the board of The American Red Cross for eleven years, and a dedicated volunteer at the local food bank.

Amongst his friends and family, Tom was a pillar of strength and unconditional love. He was always happy to be of-service, offering advice, perspective, and his famous barbecue. Tom is survived by his wife of 50 years, Anne, daughter Jessica Estill and her husband Corey, son Eric Cockley and his wife Carly, his brothers Bennet, Barry, Cliff, and Steven, numerous cousins, nieces and nephews, and a multitude of students and friends. He is preceded in death by his brother, Clay.

To honor Tom's commitment to education and inclusivity, the family has established an endowment for the Gymkhana program and in lieu of flowers asks the community to consider making a donation. To make a Memorial Gift: Please mail checks payable to University of Maryland College Park Foundation with "Cockley Endowment (Gymkhana) in the memo line to: Gift Acceptance University of Maryland College Park Foundation, 4603 Calvert Road, College Park, MD 20742.

A celebration of life will be scheduled in the future at a date to be determined.

Arrangements are under the direction of Harrod Brothers Funeral Home & Crematory.

Tribute Wall



“ *Mr. Cockley was amazing. His love for people and his compassion in teaching made him stand out amongst his peers. He was a patient listener and his words were wise. It's 2024 and I'm just learning of his passing. I'm in shock, to day the least. He was an outstanding dad, fantastic instructor, and great friend to anyone who would let him in. This is devastating news. The world lost a bright light in 2020. May God continue to bless his family.*

Christina Means - March 22, 2024 at 02:26 PM



“ *Wm. Thomas "Tom" Cockley*

October 06, 2023 at 03:15 PM



“ *1 file added to the album Memories Album*



George Jessup - July 06, 2020 at 02:57 PM



Last NCAA sponsored Div. II National Championships. Tom Cockley Lead JSU to Bronze team finish. Here the team is pulling him up to the stand where he belonged.

George Jessup - July 06, 2020 at 03:02 PM

GJ

RK/Rick below expressed it well for rest of us JSU folk. Have spoken to a few whom expressed saddened shock at his passing. Each expressed much of what Rick so eloquently stated.

George Jessup - July 06, 2020 at 03:16 PM

LR

“ *He was an Amazing Teacher, Advisor and friend. He is the reason I graduated from College thanks for believing in me, thanks for supporting me and lastly thanks for showing me how to be the best in what I Love to do! PE for life. RIP Dr. Cockely.*

LaShenta Biggers Robertson - June 24, 2020 at 11:06 AM

DG

“ *Mark and I will miss Tom, even if it's been years since we saw him. A vivid memory that I have of him is the day that he told me, "Look, no cape" while pointing to his back. When I asked him what he meant, he said that he had finally figured out that he should relax occasionally and didn't really need to be a hero for everyone all of the time.*

Those who knew Tom always knew that he strove to be his best for everyone all of the time.

I, however, knew that he would always be a hero and a superstar with or without a cape in my mind. That's how I will always remember him.

Diane Garrison - June 23, 2020 at 10:15 PM

RK

“ I first met Coach back in 1981 when I was a freshman and he became our Head Coach at JSU. He took a broken program and turned into one of the top teams in the country and along the way he helped turn a group of young kids into men and a team into a family. He had a profound effect on me as he coached me, taught me, frustrated me at times and helped me to see the bigger picture in life. He and Anne opened their home to our entire team even though I know we put a strain on their resources. He sacrificed so much for us and all he asked of us was to give our best. The word “can’t” was not allowed in the gym and academics was priority #1. We remained close even after I left the team and I had the great pleasure of seeing him a couple of years ago at the JSU Gymnastic reunion. I am saddened by his passing but I am confident that Coach fulfilled his purpose here on earth. My prayers are with Anne and his family. God Bless.

Rick Keeling - June 22, 2020 at 06:15 PM



“ Chinese Dogwood Tree was purchased for the family of Wm. Thomas "Tom" Cockley.



June 22, 2020 at 02:01 PM

JB

“ Anne, Eric and Jessica -- We are so sorry for your loss and very shocked of Tom's untimely passing. He was such a great spirit to be around. I will miss our many conversations at the Y. I feel fortunate to have known him and valued his views on many things.
Jack Bates
Iris Skidmore

Jack Bates - June 21, 2020 at 07:02 PM

CR

“ Earlier this week, I was saddened to learn of Tom's demise. I got to know the Cockley family during the time when he & Chuck worked on their PhD @ FSU. We shared many dinners, laughs & delightful times. They were immensely helpful in assisting us with transition into parenthood of our daughter Cayce.

Ann, Jessica & Eric are likely experiencing traumatic grief. I'm sure they won't lack in love & support from others. The sudden unexpected loss makes for a difficult time ahead. I hold them in my heart & thoughts.

Cindy Richards (formerly Duncan)
Lafayette, LA

Cindy Richards - June 21, 2020 at 05:17 PM

JF

“ I did not know Tom but as a fellow cyclist and resident of Woodford County, I was devastated to hear of this accident. After reading his obituary, it is obvious what an impact he had on so many lives. What a terrible, tragic loss. My deepest sympathy.

Joyce Fogleman - June 20, 2020 at 05:24 PM

TS

“ I will miss our times at the Y and all the good conversations we had. My prayers are with the family & friends. RIP Tom.



Tom Sparks - June 20, 2020 at 04:52 PM

CD

“ Tom and I first met as "opponents" when he was the coach at JSU and I was at ISU. As life would have it, we met again when we both began Ph.D. s at FSU. As most people did with Tom, we quickly became fast friends and remained so for over 30 years. When Tom became your friend, he remained so through thick and thin. He is greatly missed by many and I am one of those.

Chuck Duncan - June 20, 2020 at 03:22 PM

DL

“ I first met Tom thru his wife Anne at the Red Cross. i worked with Tom delivering the annual bean soup lunches via the Red Cross. Tom and I were able to always solve the worlds problems in about 2 hours on those days. Rest easy sir.

Dennis Lutz - June 20, 2020 at 01:35 PM

JC

“ I had the pleasure of being amongst the first students to study under Dr. Cockley when he joined the faculty at K.S.U. Years later, when I went to work for the University, Dr. Cokley was always encouraging, supportive and someone easy to call a Friend. Anyone around Dr. Cokley for any length of time knows how infectious his smile was. Of the many qualities of the man, that smile made it impossible not to have him brighten your day if you ran into him.

Jason Chapman - June 19, 2020 at 01:18 AM

SM

“ We are saddened to hear of Toms passing. Jessica and Anne, you will be in our thoughts and prayers.

Sarah Murphy - June 18, 2020 at 11:00 PM

JZ

“ So sorry to hear of the passing of Tom. Had not seen him in recent years but first met the family while the kids were running Cross Country and my friend Bev was coaching. Much love and prayers to all of his family.

Judy Zeigler - June 18, 2020 at 07:30 PM

BC

“ Tom was always so outgoing and upbeat. He lightens up my day when I would see him at the Frankfort Y. Prayers to Anne, Eric, Jessica and all the family.

Bonnie Clements - June 18, 2020 at 07:17 PM

BJ

“ So sorry to hear of this loss for his family. I did not know him well, but know Jessica and Anne. My thoughts are with the family. May they find comfort in loving memories of him in the future.

Beverly Juett - June 18, 2020 at 05:50 PM



“ So sorry to hear this he was such a good neighbor. We would stand a talk about gardening some times or our dogs very nice person RIP

Mary Cook - June 18, 2020 at 03:33 PM

CC

“ I am so sad for the sudden loss of my dear Cousin Tom. Blessed to have been able to see more frequently of late. Such a humble man yet a pillar!

Carolynn Casey - June 18, 2020 at 03:22 PM