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In Memory of Richard Dennis Gant

JULY 16TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Richard Dennis Gant, son of the late Bruce Edward Gant and Beulah Mae (Maskill) Gant, was born Sept. 9, 1946, in Dudley, MO and departed this life at Mercy Hospital of Stoddard County in Dexter, MO on July 13, 2024, at the age of 77.

Richard was a lifelong resident of Stoddard County and was of the Protestant faith. He grew up on the family farm near Dudley, where he was a great help. Richard learned to drive a tractor at the age of six, worked the cotton fields and raised hogs to help support the family. He would later apply those early acquired skills as a farmer himself for several years in his early adulthood on the family's ground.

In 1964, he graduated from Dexter High School, where he proved himself as an exceptional athlete, most notably on the grid iron. Richard was proud to be a member of the legendary Bearcat football team of 1963, with an undefeated season and rankings as a top team in the state. His skill as a lineman earned him a four-year full ride scholarship to play football at Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, MO. Richard's former college football line coach, who went on to coach for the Miami Dolphins, was quoted to say "Richard Gant was one of the best lineman I had ever coached in my career".

Along with success on the field, Richard graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Education in 1968. Soon after graduation he began a teaching and coaching football and wrestling at his alma mater, DHS.

Richard was called "Coach" by many and was honored to serve in his role. At Dexter High School, Richard would continually strive to be a positive influence on the students he coached. He took pride in the life long relationships he developed with many of his former students and players. He will be remembered for serving as a teacher of the game but also of life, building the character of his players on and off the field. Some might say that Richard himself was quite a "character" himself. He was known by his former players as both fun loving and disciplined and encouraged that from all around him. His love of the game of football led him to help start the Youth Football program in Dexter which developed a love of the sport for many young men in the community. He and his wife Tracy were lifelong supporters of all Dexter High School sports, especially football and boys and girls' basketball. Richard was a familiar face in the DHS stands for decades.

Richard would eventually leave DHS and begin his own company, Gant Excavation. Referring to himself often as “just an old ditch digger”, he built a highly successful land moving operation whose clients included many local farmers, as well as the state of Missouri. He operated this business until his retirement over 25 years ago.

Retirement allowed Richard to travel and enjoy his keen interest in history. He enjoyed visiting numerous national parks and Civil War cemeteries over the years. Retirement also allowed him to devote more time to community service as a proud member of Dexter Elks Lodge #2439, which he joined in 1972. He could often be found in the Lodge enjoying the company of lifelong friends, a Crown Royal, and a good story.

On March 13, 1974, Richard married Arvella (Tracy) Wilson Halcomb in Poplar Bluff, MO. The two shared the beautiful ups and downs of 50 years of marriage together. Tracy survives at their home on E. Kenton Rd. in Dexter.

Survivors also include a stepson, Christopher Halcomb of Cape Girardeau; one sister, Donna Gant Barker of Dudley, MO; two sisters-in-law, Dorothy (Gary) Crites and Linda Wilson; nieces, Janelle Barker Gibson of Webster Groves, MO, Kim (John) Hiley and Pamela Wilson, both of Columbia, MO; and one nephew, Randy (Debbie) Desgranges of Claremont, FL. He is also survived by several great and great-great nieces and nephews and many cousins.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his in-laws, John, Jr. and Lola Wilson; two sisters, Sylvia Gant and Mary Gant Wagner; brothers-in-law, Richard Barker, Ed Wagner, Earl Wilson and Jim Wilson; and one sister-in-law, Florence Wilson.

Visitation will take place at Mathis Funeral Home in Dexter on Friday, July 19, 2024, from noon until 1:45 p.m. At 1:45 the Dexter Elks Lodge will provide a brief memorial service. The funeral service will begin at 2:00 p.m. Internment for Richard will take place at the Missouri State Veterans Cemetery in Bloomfield, MO at 10 a.m. on Monday, July 22.

Memorials may be made to the Dexter Elks Lodge #2439, PO Box 353, Dexter, MO 63841, to support their many community programs, or to a charity of one's choice in his name.

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