



Charles Daniel "Carp" Combs

November 26, 1952 - January 6, 2026

Charles Daniel "Carp" Combs, 73, of Bloomington, Indiana, died suddenly at his home on Tuesday, January 6, 2026.

Born on November 26, 1952, to Charles and Virginia Combs, Dan was the fifth of eight children. He spent his early years in the Smithville/Handy area before his family settled in Harrodsburg. Dan had a lifelong determination to live fully, contribute meaningfully, and advocate fiercely for others.

Dan served his country in the United States Army, where he trained as a medic. During his service, he was stationed in Washington State, where he met Pat, the woman who would become his wife and lifelong partner. The two returned to Bloomington and were married on July 6, 1979, beginning 46 years of what Dan often referred to as "wedded bliss." Together they raised two children, Levi and Erin.

In 1986, Dan was elected Perry Township Trustee, a role he would hold for nearly four decades. His tenure was marked by tireless advocacy for individuals and families experiencing homelessness and financial hardship. In 2015, he was honored as Indiana Trustee of the Year, recognizing his compassion, innovation, and unwavering commitment to public service. Dan never forgot that many people are only a turn of bad luck away from needing help, and he carried that understanding into every decision he made. He had

planned to retire in 2026, concluding his tenth full term.

Alongside his work as Trustee, Dan was a writer and educator. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he authored a weekly column for the Herald-Times, sharing observations on life, community, and parenthood with humor and candor. He later returned to Indiana University, earning a degree in Continuing Studies in 1994, a Bachelor of Science in Social Studies Education in 1997, and, finally, a Master of Arts in Teaching (History).

Dan began his teaching career at Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, where he educated incarcerated men—an experience that deeply influenced his worldview and reinforced his belief in second chances. He later worked at Jackson Creek Middle School and Bloomington High School South, where he taught until his retirement in 2014. Known for his unconventional teaching style, empathy, pocketful of Jolly Ranchers, and ability to connect with students others struggled to reach, “Mr. Combs” left a lasting impression on generations of students.

Beyond his professional life, Dan was a historian, collector, traveler, storyteller, and loyal friend. He loved road trips, small back roads, museums, and conversations with strangers who quickly became friends. He formed meaningful relationships across cultures and communities, including with Amish families in southern Indiana and with Lakota friends on the Pine Ridge Reservation, whom he supported through repeated visits and supply trips.

Above all, Dan was a devoted father and a deeply proud grandfather. Known affectionately as “Grandpa Dan,” he shared a special bond with his grandsons, Mathis and Rowan, delighting in long conversations and text messages, shared curiosity, and encouraging misadventure.

Dan is survived by his wife, Pat Oskam-Combs; his children, Levi Combs and

Erin Combs-Gillott (Simon Gillott); his grandchildren, Mathis and Rowan; his siblings, Pat Combs, Mike Combs (Deb Combs), Mark Combs, Deniese Combs, and Angela Eads (Tony Eads); many nieces, nephews, and cousins; and a wide community of friends, colleagues, former students, and neighbors whose lives were changed by his presence. He was preceded in death by his parents, Charles and Virginia Combs; his sister, Shari Hanson; and his brother, Jim Combs.

True to his wishes, there will be no traditional funeral service. In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations be made to Community Kitchen or Friends Place in his memory. A celebration of life will be held in Dan's memory on Sunday, February 15, 2026 from 1-4pm at the Woolery Mill (2250 W Sunstone Dr, Space C, Bloomington, IN 47403)

Dan Combs lived a life defined by curiosity, empathy, and an unshakable belief in people. His absence will be deeply felt, but his legacy—of service, compassion, and connection—will endure.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

FEB **15**. 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

One World Woolery
2250 West Sunstone Drive
Bloomington, IN 47401

Tribute Wall

JW

“ *praying for you and your family Jessie*

jeremy Williams - January 24 at 03:26 PM

CH

“ *This man is an amazing soul and a great teacher. Every time I when to his class, it's always filled with positive vibes, (and the wall of SPAM!) As well as first time I've ever had a ghost pepper!*



Christian Hogue - January 24 at 03:18 PM

AB

“ *I was one of Mr Combs students, one of the hard to reach ones. He gifted me a second chance and intervened before I was picked up by the cops on the way to a field trip to the military museum (circa 2004). Mr Combs bailed me out of bad situations numerous times and believed in me when I didn't. I'm a professor now,thanks largely in part to his support and keeping my nose clean. You were an amazing man.*

Allison Baker - January 19 at 09:27 PM