



"Dempsey" Wayne M. Worner

December 2, 1937 - April 25, 2025

Dempsey was raised in Wahpeton, North Dakota in a blue-collar family. His mother recounted hearing him outside doing chores at age 6, muttering, “work, work, work, that’s all I do”. At 18, he married his next-door sweetheart and together they embraced humility, solid values and embodied the power and joy of human connection. If you did not yet know them – you eventually would. Random acts of kindness, pay-it-forward, social-networking, lending a hand, living simply, were his traditions long before those phrases became a part of our cultural lexicon.

Dempsey’s true-life craft was Master Weaver using his loom to draw in ideas, dreams, hopes, stories, and songs across the lives of all he touched. We watched his beautiful tapestry grow with many thousands of folks creating bands of glorious colors and textures. His quiet spirit and ability to truly listen brought so many together in disparate ways to find common ground for the good.

He was ardent about community, encircling educators, consulting clients, schoolmates, lake friends, and the underserved across our country. Inclusion was essential – exemplified by his open home and table. He never forgot his roots or those he met along the way writing newsletters and reflections, organizing reunions and visits, and calls customary touchstones.

Dempsey’s education journey began in 1955 at NDSU, completing a Doctorate in Education in 1966 at UND. He proudly served as teacher, coach, principal, and superintendent of schools in North Dakota before moving to

Virginia where he was invited to share in creating the new Virginia Tech College of Education as the first division chair in Curriculum & Instruction. He held several pivotal positions, but especially treasured hands-on advising 125 doctoral and 75 principal preparation students, before rising to the Dean of the College culminating in a Dean Emeritus designation.

With a simple needle, and one measured stitch at a time, he tailored a legacy of timeless family traditions, and strong values to ground us in our roots and bind us to each other forever. We marvel at the seams built for strength - yet they forgive; the brilliant embellishments attached for pure joy; and the tufts of padding given for comfort. He taught us to meet people where they are with grace, from the fabric of love, true care, and warmth.

Passionate enacting of his own stories; coloring characters from his voluminous joke catalog; singing with a velvety voice; dancing; knowing winks; park swinging; pond duty; fishing; flowcharting; and advice sessions are beloved memories embedded into the weft and weave of our foundation. He was a true and good man and our shining Northern Star when we were lost. Yet, we can still reach down, feel the knot, and trace our way back through the glittering strands interspersing each family flower in his masterwork, and his threads will carry us home.

Clifford, Pauline and Linda Worner (father, mother, sister) will greet Dempsey in Heaven. Remaining here are Kathie his beloved bride of 68 years, two brothers Michael and Roger Worner, son Scott (Nancy), daughters Becky (Jebb) and Tami (Zane). Grandchildren (spouses w/great-grandchildren) Hillary (Trey w/Adam, Heath, Violet), Hundley (Kristine w/Liam, Brooke); Brandon, Tarenne (Chris w/Bella, CJ, Liam), Samantha (Ryan w/Jaedyn, Kaden), Tessa (w/Creed), Melanie (w/Scottie, Eliza); Forrest, Becca (Casper w/Emory, Ellis), Stacey (w/Paisley).

He counseled us to be nice to others on our upward climb - knowing we will meet them again on a downslide, a reminder to stay humble and kind, as any foothold is an uncertain gift. Dempsey Worner – Your final climb and fine work are complete, rest assured we will take up your loom and needle. There's a

better home awaiting in the sky, Lord, in the sky... Fly high, we'll join you in the wink of an eye.

In the spirit of giving, instead of flowers please consider contributing, in his name Dempsey (Wayne) Worner to:

Wahpeton High School Alumni Endowment

North Dakota State College of Science

800 North Sixth Street

Wahpeton, North Dakota 58076

...or the...

Virginia Tech Wayne (Dempsey) Worner Scholarship Fund

University Gateway Center (0336)

902 Prices Fork Road

Blacksburg, VA 24061

...or simply pay-it-forward.

A life celebration in Virginia will be held Saturday, May 31, 2025 (1:30 – 4:30 PM) at the Warm Hearth Village Center, 2387 Warm Hearth Drive; Blacksburg, VA 24060, Blacksburg, VA 24060 (for updated information, return to Dempsey's McCoy Funeral Home page <https://www.mccoyfuneralhome.com/obituaries/dempsey-wayne-worner/#!/TributeWall>).

A Minnesota life celebration will be planned later.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

MAY 31. 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM (ET)

Warm Hearth Village Center
2387 Warm Hearth Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

LC

“ Love The Corcorans purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of "Dempsey" Wayne M. Worner.



Love The Corcorans - May 31, 2025 at 08:40 AM

LC

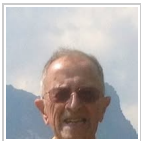
“ Love The Corcorans planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of "Dempsey" Wayne M. Worner.

Love The Corcorans - May 31, 2025 at 08:40 AM

MH

“ The world has lost one of our country's greatest educators. And all who knew him have lost a true and caring friend. I enjoyed many chats with my Wahpeton High classmate, and I treasured his reports of other classmates. (Kathie, if you would like me to do so, I will continue that work) My prayers are with you all, and I hope to attend the MN service. Peace to all, Marge Springer Zluticky Hoganson

Marjorie Hoganson - May 29, 2025 at 01:19 AM



“ Memories are a precious commodity. There was only one Dempsey. Wise beyond words. Jan and I treasure the time we spent with W2. He always left us better than he found us. Cathy was the love of his life. We send bear hugs.

Jim Sweeney - May 19, 2025 at 11:51 AM

VF

“ *The Virginia Tech German Club Alumni Foundation mourns the loss of our Honorary member Dean Worner. As a Club sponsor, he helped guide the maturity of many young men, and helped them live up to our Ritual which stresses to "First, be a Gentleman" - he certainly was that!*

VT German Club Alumni Foundation - May 14, 2025 at 12:03 PM

JS

“ *As a student he was able to teach us things about life and get the best out of us . Could be basketball track or telling us how United States was going to moon and back and we laughed at him. Got mad at us. But soon it happened just as he said.*

John Saewert - May 02, 2025 at 12:55 AM

CV

*My deepest sympathy Kathie to you and the family. It has been many years, but I have not forgotten what we shared in Wahpeton. May he rest in the arms of our loving saviour.
Carol Vigsnes*

Carol Vigsnes - May 02, 2025 at 05:49 PM

MS

“ *Dempsey and Kathie always welcomed me into their home and treated me like family. My heart goes out to the entire Worner family as Dempsey was the definition of the family pillar and leader. I know what you all are going through but I also know how many wonderful family memories you have to share with each other because of him. My love to you all, Missy Stillinger.*

Missy Stillinger - May 01, 2025 at 09:22 PM

DH

“ *Kathie and family.....I feel very sad today to learn of Dempsey's death.
He was a TRUE FRIEND and the PILLAR of my 1955 Wahpeton High
School Class.....My remaining classmates and myself will miss him.
Love to all of Dempsey's family.....Donna Karst Healy, Fargo*

Donna Healy - April 30, 2025 at 04:27 PM

AS

“ *What a beautiful obituary for a truly amazing man!*

Dr. Worner's heart was so big and his interest and compassion for others so great, that he somehow managed to keep his schedule wide-open for all of us at all times. Whether by phone, appointment, or my personal favorite...his drop-in visits when he was just passing through, were always warm, inspiring and intellectually invigorating.

How he managed to never be in a rush for any conversation when he was actively engaging and mentoring 100's of us for decades is a wonderful mystery. Perhaps as one of His most especially gifted servants, God gave Dempsey 30 hours in day while the rest of us only get 24!

Lifting up Scott and the family in prayer, that the pain of grief will fully morph into all fond memories that are beautifully preserved in the "tapestry"!

Alan Seibert - April 30, 2025 at 01:15 PM

SS

“ Dr. Worner was a mentor and a sage guide to me in my doctoral program and career. When I was in Richmond at VDOE he would take the time to drop by for early morning coffee while traveling to his next stop. I cherished those “Coffee Chats” and the opportunity to share thoughts and perspectives with one of the wisest and most humble leaders I’ve ever encountered. Time with him was informative and therapeutic. I will miss opportunities to talk with him and hear some of his terrific stories. I truly believe I learned almost as much in his backyard as I did in class and work settings. What a life he had!! I am saddened and extend my heartfelt sympathies to the family and legions of friends and grateful educators he influenced.

Steven Staples - April 30, 2025 at 12:24 PM

DM

“ Wayne Worner was instrumental in creating my whole career of 46 years in education for which I will be forever grateful. Dave Bucher, Bemidji mn.

Dave Bucher, Bemidji Mn - April 29, 2025 at 10:57 PM

JW

“ . Scott, Becky Tami. What a wonderful man your dad was. He was a great friend of my father’s. I got to know him well after high school as I worked at the VT golf course He, Niles, and my dad cracked me up. He gave me sound advice a 18 year old needed while charting my way into adulthood. Your family was a strong part of my childhood and I am sorry for you loss . I want to say your father was loved by many. Joe Weber.

Joe Weber - April 29, 2025 at 07:36 PM

DM

“ A colleague, a mentor, a best friend for more than 60 years. My good fortune to have known Dempsey. We worked together, traveled together and enjoyed life together. We have lost a good man but not all the good memories. Don Mrdjenovich

Don Mrdjenovich - April 29, 2025 at 10:52 AM



“ We are so sorry to hear of Dempsey's passing. Had it not been for his support of our father, Phil Jones, the trajectory of our lives would be different. Coming to Virginia Tech as an adventure and launched my sister and I in lives we enjoy and are thankful for Dempsey's role in making that a reality. Our Dad and Mom Dorothy would be saddened as well. May his memory be a blessing.

Valerie Jones - April 29, 2025 at 10:40 AM

GK

“ I am deeply saddened by the news of Dempsey's passing. We worked together with him on League's Education Issues! He supported me when I served on the MCPS School Board. He was a role model for me. Deepest condolences to the family. He will be missed! Gunin Kiran

Gunin Kiran - April 29, 2025 at 09:33 AM