



## Dr. Robert L. Thurness

December 30, 1938 - October 13, 2018

Dr. Robert L. Thurness, 79, of Marion, passed away unexpectedly on Saturday, October 13, 2018. Family members include his best friend and spouse, Carol Sue of Marion, Iowa; son, Dr. Brent Thurness (Shelly Thurness) of Rapid City, South Dakota; two daughters Amy Thurness-Yazzie (CSM Alexander Yazzie) of El Paso, Texas, Lisa Sanders (Timothy Sanders) of Chicago, Illinois; and grandchildren Cole, Chase and Emma Thurness; Alexandra, Julian, Jaden, and Jace Yazzie; Brendan, Kylie, Kaelan, and Clare-Rose Sanders.

Robert Thurness was born December 30, 1938 in West Liberty, Iowa to LeRoy and Niada Thurness. He graduated from West Liberty High School in 1957. "Bob" to his friends, went on to receive his bachelor degree in 1962 from Coe College. Bob participated in football, baseball and track during his college career. During his time at Coe, Bob met the love of his life, Carol Sue Crookham.

Bob went on to pursue his Masters degree in Health & Physical Education at South Dakota State University. A week prior to graduating with his masters, Bob and Carol were married and just recently celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on July 27, 2018. Coaching was his true passion. Coach Thurness was a high school teacher for 16 years, teaching American History, Biology, Physical Education, Geography and Government. During his early career, Coach Thurness acquired the nickname "Thurny." After successful stops in Tripoli and Bloomfield, Thurny led the Eldora Tigers to a 22-1-1 record over three years with the '66, '67, '68 classes. After brief stints at the University of Dubuque and Coe College, Coach Thurness returned to the high school ranks at Linn-Mar High School and Tipton High School. In 1974, Thurny took the Head Football Coaching position at Marion High School. It was here, that Coach Thurness won his 3A Iowa State Football Championships in 1980. The Marion Indian record during this time was 102-33-1. It was also during this time that Thurny earned his masters and Ph.D in Educational Administration from the University of Iowa.

Dr. Thurness never returned to the high school ranks. Thurny accepted an opportunity to

coach at his alma mater Coe College, in Cedar Rapids in 1981. At Coe College, Thurny had a 43-20-2 record with four conference division titles and two outright conference championships. He coached two regular season undefeated teams and led Coe back to national prominence with Coe's first NCAA playoff team. Bob coached six All-American athletes, including his son, and 83 All-Conference players in seven years. Coach Thurness also served for five years as the Head Women's Softball Coach leading them to five conference championships and ranked teams.

Thurny left Coe in 1989, for an opportunity to coach at University of Northern Iowa as a Special Teams Coordinator and outside LB's coach. After a few years, Thurny returned to the Midwest Collegiate Conference to finish his coaching career as an assistant coach at Cornell College. While there, the Rams enjoyed a six year run of success including an undefeated 10-0 season and several Midwest Conference Championships.

Dr. Robert Thurness was inducted into the Coe College Athletic Hall of Fame, the Iowa High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame, the Marion Athletic Hall of Fame and the West Liberty High School Hall of Fame. After his coaching and teaching career, Thurny worked on the restoration of the Marion Depot, served on the Marion History Cultural Center Task Force, Marion Historical Preservation Commission and worked on the family farm.

Visitation will be held from 3 – 8 pm on Tuesday, October 16, 2018, at Murdoch Funeral Home & Cremation Service, Marion, Iowa. Cremation will follow the visitation. An additional celebration of Dr. Robert Thurness's life will be held from 1 - 5 pm on Saturday, November 24, 2018, at Clark Alumni House at Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Memorial contributions may be made to the "Dr. Robert L. Thurness Educational Scholarship Fund" at the Marion Farmers State Bank, 1240 8th Avenue, Marion, Iowa 52302.

# Events

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**OCT 16**   **Visitation**   03:00PM - 08:00PM

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Murdoch Funeral Home & Cremation Service - Marion  
3855 Katz Drive, Marion, IA, US, 52302

**NOV 24**   **Celebration of Life**   01:00PM - 05:00PM

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Clark Alumni House - Coe College  
200 College Drive NE, Cedar Rapids, IA, US, 52402

# Comments

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“ A tribute video has been added.



**Murdoch Funeral Homes & Cremation Service** - October 16, 2018 at 12:27 PM

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“ Carol, Brent, Amy and Lisa....

I just learned of Coach's passing. I, along with so many others, am saddened by the news. Coach had a positive influence on so many of his athletes and students, myself included. I have so many wonderful memories as a player and assistant coach for Thurny. I am proud to be able to say I was his first quarterback at Marion High School back in 1974. Thurny left his stamp on coaching and life as only he could have done. And yes Coach, as you told me time and time again....."it is great to be Young and a Yankee"

God Bless

Gary Fickel

**Gary Fickel** - November 14, 2018 at 03:00 PM



“ Thank you Gary:). We are grateful for your kind words.

**Amy Yazzie** - May 31 at 09:00 AM

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“ Carole and Brent- my sincere condolences- Coach Thurney was a great man, a great inspiration and has had a lasting impact on many of his players lives, mine included. I wasn't able to get back to Iowa for the service but please know that I was there in heart and spirit. I have many fond memories of great games with him and equally some of his epic comments and "thurneyisms" He lived life with zest and helped many to find their true potential. And always with a unique sense of humor. He will certainly be missed, but will live on in all of our lives through the inspiration he taught us. All the best to you Harold Phillips

**harold phillips** - October 23, 2018 at 07:43 PM



“ Thank you Harold for your kind words.

Warm regards- Amy

**Amy Yazzie** - October 26, 2018 at 02:16 PM

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“ To Coach Thurness' Family and all the people who's live he touched along the way,

It was with great sadness that I learned of Coach's passing last week. I had the chance to play for a variety of coaches over my years of high school and college athletics, and none left as big an impression as Thurney. He was the defensive line coach for my years at Cornell, giving me the opportunity to learn daily lessons in toughness, sacrifice, discipline, and...well toughness again.

Those lessons were always the meat of any wisdom from Coach, but they were always served with humor and wit. His expressions were legendary, and while this isn't the forum to share many of them (there might be kids reading...) rest assured that he made the rigors of college football bearable by making sure that we knew that in the end, this was for fun. I think that's the lesson that I hold the most dear from Coach Thurney, that even in shared sacrifice, that despite the aches and pains that come with pushing ourselves to our limits, there was joy to be found. Joy in doing your job well, joy in being part of something bigger than yourself, and joy in delivering a perfectly timed one liner.

Thank you Coach, I am a better man for having been part of your team.

Respect and condolences,

Matt Weiss

Cornell Football 1995-1998

**matt weiss** - October 22, 2018 at 01:33 PM



“ Matt- Thank you for sharing. Your kind words mean a lot to our family.

Warm regards;

Brent, Amy & Lisa

**Amy Yazzie** - October 26, 2018 at 02:24 PM

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“ Dear Thurness family,

I was saddened to hear of the passing of Coach Thurness. During my years at Coe, Coach Thurness was more than a coach. He always showed a special interest in his players asking about our studies and showing interest in our personal lives. He was a true inspiration for me as he always instilled a positive, can-do attitude. I know he will be sorely missed. Thank you for sharing him with us.

Dennis Gay '71

**Den-Vicki Gay** - October 21, 2018 at 03:13 PM



“ Thank you Dennis! It is so nice to hear that all those hours away truly were appreciated.  
Kind regards;  
The Thurness Family

**Amy Yazzie** - October 26, 2018 at 01:26 PM

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“ My sympathy to all the members of the Thurness family. I have very fond memories of Bob when he coached at Coe during the time I was teaching there, and very good memories of son Brett in my biology classes. Floyd Sandford

**Floyd Sandford** - October 18, 2018 at 04:23 PM



“ Thank you Mr Sanford!  
Warm regards-  
Amy

**Amy Yazzie** - October 26, 2018 at 02:27 PM

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“ Dear Carol, I am sorry to hear of your husband's unexpected death. My sympathy goes out to you and your family at this difficult time. May you be blessed with peace.

**sal miller EIHQ** - October 17, 2018 at 05:51 PM



“ Thank you Mr. Miller for your condolences.  
Kind regards;

The Thurness Family

**Amy Thurness Yazzie** - November 10, 2018 at 01:07 PM

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“ Can't get back to Iowa at this time but my thoughts and prayers are with Carol and the family. Lon Cakerice, Eldora HS Class of 67 and Coe College Class of 71.

**Lon Cakerice** - October 17, 2018 at 02:14 PM



“ Thank you Lon. The flowers were absolutely beautiful & greatly appreciated.  
Warm regards;  
The Thurness Family

**Amy Yazzie** - October 26, 2018 at 02:29 PM

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“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 17, 2018 at 11:18 AM

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“ My Thoughts and Prayers to Carol and the Family. It was my honor to work with Coach during his time at Cornell. I will forever carry his memory and stories with me. I'm a much better person for having worked with Coach. God Bless

**Dick R Simmons** - October 16, 2018 at 06:57 PM



“ Thank you Dick. We are grateful for your kind words.  
Warm regards;

The Thurness Family

**Amy Thurness Yazzie** - November 10, 2018 at 02:09 PM

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“ Carol and family: I am shocked and saddened to hear about the passing of Coach Thurness. I have such great memories of my time on the softball field at Coe, with him as our coach. He always fondly called me "Eb", even after I got married. I also worked in the Coe Athletic Office a couple of summers, in which he had me re-diagram his football playbook. (he was very trusting, I guess! ha). I am so thankful that I got to see him at my Hall of Fame Induction a couple of years ago. I always looked forward to his Christmas letter and card each year, in which he would remind me of the time that I hit a home-run over the fence. I will always have his voice in my head and I will treasure every memory. My sympathy. He will be greatly missed. Lorri (Eberhard) Zeller '84.

**Lorri Zeller** - October 16, 2018 at 05:00 PM



“ Thank you so much Lorri. Your kind words mean a great deal to us. He always adored his softball players & students.

Kind regards-

Amy

**Amy Yazzie** - October 26, 2018 at 01:31 PM

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“ Carol and Thurness Family,  
My deepest sympathies. Coach Thurness was my favorite coach in Football and Track my junior year at Coe(1970-1971). I thought he was awesome. We really ht it off together. I have such great memories of him. So glad I got to tell him that a few years back.  
Roger Grefe (Des Moines)

roger grefe - October 16, 2018 at 04:24 PM



“ Thank you so much Roger! This is so nice to hear and really helps our hearts as we are healing.  
Thank you-  
The Thurness Family

Amy Yazzie - October 28, 2018 at 03:26 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 03:15 PM



“ To Carol and your children and grandchildren:  
Deb and I send our deepest sympathies and condolences. We have memories, lessons and stories of those formative years with Coach Thurness at Eldora High School that will last a lifetime! His impact on our lives was significant. He had a larger than life personality and presence and was so much fun!!! He taught the value of hard work and discipline and the importance of education. He encouraged caring about and being loyal to friends, teammates and coaches as if they were family. I (Mike) modeled my teaching and coaching career after Coach. A prized possession is a card and picture I received from him about ten years ago out of the blue. When we remember Coach our first thought is that you loved all of your players and students and made each of us feel special and valued! You will be missed by all but rest assured that your legacy will continue not only in your children and grandchildren, but in your former players and students as well.

Mike Hyland and Deb Hyland - Eldora Class of 1969

Mike Hyland - October 16, 2018 at 03:06 PM



“ Thank you Hyland Family. Your sentiments mean so much to us. Dad truly loved his students/athletes and it means a lot to hear that you knew that was the case. We are grateful for your kind words.

**Amy Yazzie** - May 31 at 09:03 AM

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“ Carol, Brent, Amy, and Lisa,  
Carol - although we are fellow members of the quilt guild that is not my connection to your husband, Bob. He was often mentioned among my husband's "sports gang" - stories there abound; but, my favorite memory of Bob was when he showed up at Wright Elementary with his entire Coe College Football team, for our "Very Important Reader" day. And what a day it was. He gifted me (the library media specialist, at the times) with a Coe Jersey ... and one of my four boys quickly claimed it and I no longer am in possession of that shirt. But the graciousness of his gift in organizing, pep-talking his players, and coming with enthusiasm to participate in motivating our Wright Elementary Students to read, lives on. The best gift of all is the gift of reading. He lead in so many ways, not only in sports but in education as well. A thoughtful and kind man who gave of himself in many ways.  
Carol, Brent, Amy, and Lisa - may your memories keep your husband/dad forever in your hearts.

**Sharron McElmeel** - October 16, 2018 at 12:32 PM



“ Awww Sharron! Than you for sharing the Wright Elementary memory. All of us are avid readers to this day because of the love of reading and knowledge he instilled in us. Thank you as well for the beautiful plant you ordered in memory of Dad. Your generosity is truly appreciated!

Kind regards;  
The Thurness Family

**Amy Thurness Yazzie** - November 10, 2018 at 01:19 PM

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“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 12:29 PM

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“ Coach Thurness was a true gentleman, a man among men, he will be missed. Always enjoyed being around him from splitting wood to just shooting the breeze. Proud to call him a friend. Rest in peace Thurney, you are my hero, Steve Eden

Steve Eden - October 16, 2018 at 12:08 PM



“ Thank you Steve. Your words really warm our heart. He definitely was the true patriarch of our family.

Respectfully;  
The Thurness Family

Amy Thurness Yazzie - November 10, 2018 at 01:14 PM

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“ Enchanted Cottage was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 11:49 AM

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“ Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 11:44 AM

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“ To The Thurness Family,

What an outstanding man that we will miss. Coach Thurness was one of the most positive people that a person will meet regarding the ability of educators and coaches to make a difference in student-athletes' lives. He had the capacity to have people believe in themselves and to overcome the challenges of life that everyone faces at one time or another. The ability to have people believe there are no limits in what they can achieve. Coach Thurness professed and exhibited the spirit of doing, the drive of perseverance, the dignity of work, the integrity of character, the power of

kindness, the honor of duty, the virtue of patience, and the joy of originating.

He made a huge difference in my life and for that I am forever grateful that I knew the man as a teacher, coach, and friend.

Jim & Amber Dostal

**Jim Dostal** - October 16, 2018 at 11:39 AM

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“ Chris Shilhanek, MHS , 1980 purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



**Chris Shilhanek, MHS , 1980** - October 16, 2018 at 11:22 AM

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“ 89 files added to the album LifeTributes



**Murdoch Funeral Homes & Cremation Service** - October 16, 2018 at 10:43 AM

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“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 10:36 AM

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“ Sending my thoughts and prayers to you, Carol and your family. I pray that you will find strength and comfort in the days ahead. Linda Icenbice

Linda Icenbice - October 16, 2018 at 10:22 AM

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“ To Bob's family my heart aches for you with your loss. He was one of a kind. His effect on so many was magnificent. I wait for the time I can see him again on the other side. Godspeed!

Marty, Deb, Bob Jim and Dan Richards.

Marty Richards - October 16, 2018 at 10:07 AM

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“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 09:09 AM

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“ Carol and family,  
So very sorry to hear about coach. He was truly an outstanding man and the best football coach I ever had. Coach gave me leadership skills that I used my entire life. I talked about him often with friends. He always sent me hand written Christmas cards and I will miss that very much this year. I will miss him always and he will not be forgotten.

Randy Moore  
Tipton football player

randy moore - October 16, 2018 at 08:56 AM

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“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 16, 2018 at 07:32 AM



“ We were deeply sorry to learn of Bob's passing. He was--and will always be--a true legend of Coe College. Generations of alumni have told me what a powerful presence he was in their lives--tough and caring at the same time. Our entire community will miss him greatly.

**Dave McInally** - October 15, 2018 at 10:23 PM



“ Wow Dave- this means so much to us. Thank you for sharing your kind sentiments. You have no idea how much this means to us.

**Amy Yazzie** - May 31 at 09:08 AM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 15, 2018 at 10:09 PM



“ Carol, Brent, Amy, and Lisa,  
I want to say "thank you". Thank you for sharing your husband and father with myself and hundreds of other athletes over the span of many decades. The time he spent away from his family was time he was using to have such a profound influence and impact in our lives. All of us who were so fortunate to have "Coach" be part of our life are grateful for the time sacrifices your family has made. We wouldn't be the people we are today without his presence.

My prayers are with you in this difficult time.

Larry Atwater

**Larry Atwater** - October 15, 2018 at 09:47 PM



“ Carol and family, I am so sorry to hear of the passing of Thurny. He provided so much advice and guidance to me, gave me so many coaching opportunities while at Coe and a start to my education career for which I am so truly thankful. The memories are numerous and will be remembered forever.

**Jim Muench** - October 15, 2018 at 09:46 PM



“ My condolences to all of you. The world lost a dedicated man to athletics, teaching, family and the community where he lived. I was blessed to develop a friendship with Coach as an alumnus of Coe College and fellow Eastern Iowa resident. We had great times touring through Cedar County and West Liberty where he grew up. I never tired of his stories and how much he thought of his former players, coaches and friends.

His love for his family was evident. He relied on each of your strengths and adored his grandchildren. Thank you for sharing him with all of us. The world lost a great one. I will be forever grateful Thurny had an impact on my life.

God bless each of you at this difficult time, Jean Johnson

**Jean Johnson** - October 15, 2018 at 09:09 PM

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“ While I never played football for Coach Thurness, I enjoyed being in his American History and Government classes. My love for both of those today is due to his teaching. Rest in peace Mr. Thurness.  
Jim Loes MHS Class of 1976

**Jim Loes** - October 15, 2018 at 07:58 PM



“ Thank you Jim! Dad loved his students above all. We appreciate your kind words:)  
**Amy Yazzie** - May 23 at 01:09 AM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



**Michael S Skilling** - October 15, 2018 at 06:54 PM

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“ Large Basket Garden was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 15, 2018 at 06:40 PM

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“ Dear Lisa, Tim and family. My prayers and thoughts are with you. With deepest sympathy to all.  
Sandra McNeela.

**Sandra McNeela** - October 15, 2018 at 06:31 PM

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“ Mark and Brenda Ehlers purchased the Lovely One Spathiphyllum Plant for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



**Mark and Brenda Ehlers** - October 15, 2018 at 06:15 PM

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“ Kim, Ken, Beau & Morgan Grant & Tracy Baumann purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



**Kim, Ken, Beau & Morgan Grant & Tracy Baumann** - October 15, 2018 at 06:04 PM

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“ From the families of Stanton and Joan Thurness purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



From the families of Stanton and Joan Thurness - October 15, 2018 at 05:31 PM

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“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert L. Thurness.



October 15, 2018 at 05:21 PM

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“ Carol, Brent, Amy and Lisa,  
I am so very sorry for your loss. Coach meant so much to me and our entire family. I just saw him at the Marion- Maquoketa game where the 1978 Playoff team was honored. He was a fixture around the community and he always greeted you with a smile and a hearty handshake. This past Spring I had posted some pictures on Facebook from track days gone by and the discussion turned to Coach's demeanor. The best way to describe him is he extracted the best out of you. He wasn't our favorite person during practice but the results showed up on the track. We found out that "you don't puke on his time" and we laugh at that now but it was his way of getting us to do more than we thought we could. I think that is why we loved and respected him so much. That is why everywhere he went, he succeeded. There were no shortcuts. He was an in your face attention getting coach. But he had a hug for you after every game. When you played for coach, you became his "son" and he had so many. When I was at Coe, my football career didn't pan out like I had hoped and while recovering from knee surgery, he and Doc Spellman came over to the hospital after they got home from an away game, like 8:30 in the evening and visited me. That was just the kind of man he was. He did the right thing. Always. You may not have agreed with him at the time, but as time went on, you found out he was right probably 99 if not 100% of the time. He expected us to do the right thing. We were expected to be proud productive members of society when we left Coach and with his legacy, how could we help but not be? The first time my son met him, he was taken with how interested Coach was in what he was doing and how he was doing. It really hurt to hear of Coach's passing on Saturday, I still don't want to believe it. He was a person that I really thought would outlive us all. I know he is in a better place.

Our playbook was very specific if you played for the Indians. He had a schedule we followed be it during the week or on Saturday and Sunday. Sunday was "church and run". Gonna miss you Coach. My life is much better for having known you and for the role model you were. God Speed. I am sure if Perk is up there trying to air it out, you are there to remind him that fullback trap is always there! With love, Ron and Kim Knapp and family

**Ron Knapp** - October 15, 2018 at 04:58 PM

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“ Carol and children, my heart goes out to you. I will always cherish the memories of the great times Thurny and I shared over the years. He was a great coach and a great man.  
RIP, Thurny!

Maury Waugh

**Maury Waugh** - October 15, 2018 at 12:54 PM

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“ Robert was a great coach to our son Tim, but I most remember him because when Tim passed away he took time to call us with condolences it takes a good man to do that.

**Patricia Nightingale** - October 15, 2018 at 07:19 AM



“ Thank you Mrs Nightengale:). We truly appreciate your kind words. We definitely are feeling a void in our family & your sentiments truly help.

**Amy Yazzie** - May 23 at 01:12 AM

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“ The positive impact Thurny had on so many people is priceless. What a legacy he has. We have lost a great coach, husband, father, grandfather, friend, community supporter and icon. He was always about “family”... his own, his teams, or yours. Our thoughts and prayers for his families...

**Tim Touro** - October 15, 2018 at 06:35 AM



“ Thank you Tim! Hugs to you for your kind words:)

**Amy Yazzie** - May 23 at 01:13 AM

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“ Carol and family, my heart goes out to you. Thurny was a great man.  
Priscilla Blecha

Priscilla Blecha - October 15, 2018 at 06:12 AM

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“ My deeply sincere condolences to the entire Thurness Family. Coach changed my life for the best and his legacy will endure for generations. His attitude of perseverance and ambition are ones that have passed on to my children and to students that I came in contact with during my career. Coach, we love you continue to say 'thanks'.

Larry Gene Farmer, Eldora High. '67, Univ. Dubuque, '71.



Larry Gene Farmer - October 14, 2018 at 06:52 PM



“ I learned of Bob's passing today from Facebook, thanks to Nick Hobbs. We are in Alabama for two weeks,  
I've known Bob as coach and friend since the 60's. Our paths crossed many times including grad school at Iowa.  
Condolences from Nancy and I.  
We'll be there for the Nov. celebration

Steve Williams - October 16, 2018 at 07:37 PM



“ I am so grateful for the time I spent with Thurny. It was such a great opportunity to have him as my coach, my boss and most importantly my dear friend. God puts special people in our lives and it was no accident Thurny crosses my path. So many of the blessings I have had in life trace back to the many years I coached. Without Thurny's support and direction who knows how things turn out.

Thank you Carol Sue and family for sharing Bob. He will be greatly missed but always deeply loved.

God bless.

Dave Brown

dave brown - October 23, 2018 at 11:13 PM