

T.R. Cook, who chronicled Vienna life for decades, dies at 93

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By Brian Trompeter

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Vienna resident T.R. Cook, seen here photographing a local chamber of commerce

Casino Night event in 2011, died Dec. 11, 2022, at age 93. (File photo by Brian Trompeter)

Brian Trompeter

For decades in the town of Vienna, T.R. Cook was the man who took people's portraits and photographed business and community events, recording the town's history.

Cook, who died Dec. 11 at age 93, made the town a better place and was a strong advocate of young people, friends said.

"T.R. Cook was a pillar of the Vienna community for as long as any of us can remember," said former Vienna Town Council member Michael Polychrones. "He showed true selfless devotion to the town and its citizens. He, like others before him, was one of those business owners who believed that the more you give back to the community, the more you will be rewarded."

"He was one of the kindest people I have ever known," said Vienna Mayor Linda Colbert. "He was a good friend of my family's and was the photographer for my husband and my wedding. T.R. understood what made Vienna special and was a volunteer and loved member of the community. I will miss him dearly."

Thomas Ross Cook Jr. was born in Tennessee on June 27, 1929, and drafted into the U.S. Army in 1952.

"He struck a deal with his recruiter to finish high school," said Nash Cook, one of his grandsons. "He did eight years in the military and became a paratrooper to send more money home. He later went into the guard and reserves and retired as a lieutenant colonel."

T.R. Cook never forgot about his paratrooper years, however. In 2002, he commemorated the 50th anniversary of his first time parachuting by doing a static-line jump in Orange, Va.

Nash Cook said he and his grandfather had a "very personal relationship" in which the elder "taught me a people-first approach to business."

T.R. Cook opened Cook's Photo Art Studio in 1966 at his residence at 135 Park St., N.E.

“T.R. photographed activities and events in the town of Vienna for many decades and therefore was also a local historian of our community,” said former Mayor Laurie DiRocco. “He was quick to smile and help out in community events.”

Former Vienna Town Council member Edythe Kelleher recalled how Cook each year would take portrait photos of town officials, Council members and candidates for free.

“The town of Vienna has lost a generous friend in T.R. Cook,” she said.

“He was at every event, taking pictures. And T.R. was a great photographer. If he took a picture of you, you were guaranteed to look good. He was relentlessly friendly and cheerful, and always had a big smile and hug ready whenever I saw him.”

Town Council member Carey Sienicki recalled how Cook offered to place one of her campaign signs prominently on his lawn.

“He was always so kind and easy to be around with a good word,” she said. “He had a very keen eye and loved to take photographs of special town events.”

Cook was “a believer in the importance of local government [and] always ready with a friendly greeting – even when he was behind his camera, which seemed to be nearly always the case,” said former Council member Laurie Cole. “He gave so generously of his time and his skills. Into his 80s, he was climbing on chairs to get a good angle for group shots of award-winning students or civic-club officers.”

A fire badly damaged Cook’s house April 16 and firefighters had to rescue him. According to fire investigators, the blaze started on the second floor and was caused by spontaneous combustion of home-improvement materials such as sawdust, floor-stain cans and rags.

The fire caused about \$513,500 worth of damage, but Nash Cook said he intends to repair the home and make it his residence.

T.R. Cook joined the Optimist Club of Greater Vienna in 1974 and served one year as its president. He also founded the Optimist Club of Great Falls in 1992 and was its president from 2004 to 2016, said Tom Bauer, president of the Vienna club. Cook also served a term as vice president of Optimist International, he added.

Cook helped create the Vienna club's annual Youth Awards of Excellence "since he felt that high-school juniors deserved recognition as well as the seniors and it would be more likely to be a benefit to them for their college résumés," Bauer said.

The Vienna club administers the award to rising high-school seniors in six areas of excellence – academics, citizenship, fine arts, science, sports and technology – and in 2015 renamed the honors after Cook, Bauer said.

"T.R. was one of the kindest, gentlest people I have ever known and his commitment to the youth of the greater Vienna area was unparalleled," he said.

"T.R. was always generous with his time and often took photos of public events for the town," said Vienna Town Attorney Steven Briglia. "In addition to being a talented photographer, he was a kind and warm person who always seemed to have a smile on his face. Even after the fire to his photography studio and home, he always looked to the positive things in life."

Cook was preceded in death by parents, Thomas R. and Lula Lowery Cook; son Stephen Cook; brother Carson Cook; and sisters Eula Hagy, Mary Rose Moore, Joyce Sweis, Nola McHone, Quincetta Bookout and Gena Robin Reagan.

Cook is survived by his longtime companion, Betty Swartz, of Great Falls; his son Tom (spouse Barbara) Cook III; daughter in-law Roberta Cook; grandchildren Lucas (Andrea) Cook, Mason Cook and Nash Cook; sister Jewel (George) Frazier; and brother in-law Wilford Bookout.

The family invites friends to share memories and condolences at <https://directcremationservicesofvirginia.com/obituaries>. Memorial donations may be made to the Optimist Club of Greater Vienna, P.O. Box 411, Vienna, Va. 22183.

Cook will be buried at Ogden Cemetery in Dayton, Tenn.



\Vienna resident T.R. Cook, who in the 1950s was a U.S. Army paratrooper, died Dec. 11, 2022, at age 93. (Family photo)