



Leland Ray Cates

July 15, 1940 - August 30, 2026

Paducah, Kentucky

Leland Ray Cates died in Paducah on August 30, 2026. He was 86. Born in Paducah on July 15, 1940, into a Kentucky river folk household that treated work as a language. He learned early that a day is something you finish, not something you wait for.

He knew the Ohio by sound at night. Engine rooms were his cathedral; a folded chart in his pocket marked bends he could run half asleep. Colleagues still mention a river chart folded to the Ohio bend.

He married Betty in 1962. They kept a house that stayed modest when the neighborhood did not. They raised a daughter through public schools and ordinary weather. After Betty died in 2019, he kept the routines that still made sense: the walk, the garden, the Sunday call.

Neighbors remember covered dishes that arrived without a speech. He liked early mornings before the heat or the noise. He died in Paducah, among streets he never needed to explain. The chair by the window still holds the shape of a habit.

Services

A memorial gathering in Paducah with coffee afterward. In lieu of flowers, a gift to a local workers' fund, clinic, or neighborhood library is welcome.

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