

Donald L. Kerouac, 74, of Kankakee, passed away Saturday (Aug. 3, 2024), at his home.

He was born Oct. 26, 1949, in Kankakee, the son of Leslie and Alice (Book) Kerouac. Donald married Billie Kern in 1994, at St. Mark's United Methodist Church in Kankakee.

Donald was not only a well-known ham radio operator, but a photographer and caver, among many other interests, including astronomy and astrophotography. He spent many nights in his observatory studying the stars.

He made key contributions in exploration and conservation of caves and their environments. Don was a past member of the Cave Research Foundation, giving him the opportunity to explore and survey sections of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, and participate in Mammoth Cave Restoration Camps. He was a longtime member of the Near Normal Grotto chapter of the National Speleological Society (NSS), and held officer positions within the group. His experience led him to be a key part of the Karst Conservancy of Illinois, including serving as president. He was part of the early explorations, surveying and conservation efforts of Pautler and Twin Culverts Caves in Southern Illinois, along with helping efforts to protect other endangered karst areas. He was a recognized figure at caving events such as Old-Timers' Reunions, NSS National Conventions and Missouri Valley Ozark Regional Conventions.

From 1978 to 2015, Don made a successful career as a radio broadcast engineer, full turnkey services, from studios to transmitter plants, including AM directional arrays and fine tuning of FM antennas with over 70 stations in the Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Michigan areas. His professional career shaped him as an expert radio station builder and customer service talent for the broadcast industry. His technical knowledge in broadcast engineering, antennas and station design was unparalleled. He was always willing to help with ideas on station improvement with local hams as well.

Prior to his retirement from his business, Midwest Broadcasting and ISP Services, Don was chief engineer of WKAN Radio for 25 years.

In the early days, Don taught electronics classes at a junior college and worked for Motorola MSS.

Don was the "go to" guy in his beloved KARS (Kankakee Area Radio Society), that he joined immediately after receiving his ham radio license in 1968, having held every office for many years, most recently as vice president and served as the newsletter editor as well. Don enjoyed transmitter hunting with the club. Don had been a ham radio volunteer examiner since 1984 and assistant to the director of the AARL (American Radio Relay League).

He had documented contacts with 343 countries. The walls in his ham shack office were covered by awards he won for winning radio contests and achieving his goals.

Surviving are his wife, Billie Kerouac; two daughters, Jennifer Kerouac (Scott Steinhart) and Julie (Jason) Williams; one son, David Kerouac and fiancée, Amada Roth; one stepdaughter, Sheri (Stuart) Clifford; one brother, Dennis (Sharon) Kerouac; and eight grandchildren. Preceding him in death were his parents; and one sister, Judith Kerouac.

Visitation will be from 1 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 11, until the 4:30 p.m. funeral service, both at Clancy-Gernon Funeral Home in Bourbonnais. Private family interment will be at a later date in All Saints Cemetery, Bourbonnais.

Memorials may be made to River Valley Cat Oasis in Momence.

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