Dr. Kenneth Cooper

- “Father of Aerobics”
- Founder and Chairman, Cooper Aerobics Center

When Kenneth H. Cooper, M.D., M.P.H., published his first bestseller, Aerobics, in 1968, he introduced a new word and a new concept to America. Millions of people started exercising, motivated by his preventive medicine research, persuasive public appearances, and inspiring books. In short, a young Air Force physician who had once been a track star in his native Oklahoma had started a worldwide fitness revolution.

Born March 4, 1931, in Oklahoma City, Dr. Cooper's father, a periodontist, instilled in him the idea and desire to practice preventive medicine. With a natural ability in sports and a strong academic mind, Dr. Cooper completed his undergraduate and medical degrees at the University of Oklahoma. He also holds an M.P.H. degree from the Harvard University School of Public Health.

Dr. Cooper joined the military in 1957. During his 13 years of service in the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force, Dr. Cooper served as a flight surgeon and director of the Aerospace Medical Laboratory in San Antonio. He dreamed of becoming an astronaut and worked with the National Aeronautics Space Administration to help create the conditioning program preparing America's astronauts for space and in-flight exercise systems used on board spacecraft. He also developed the 12-minute and 1.5-mile fitness tests and the Aerobics Point System, all used today by military organizations, amateur and professional athletic teams, law enforcement agencies, and many public schools and universities all over the world.

Dr. Cooper's work with the Air Force and NASA launched his aerobics life work, but it was his own health crisis that made it personal. While water skiing at age 29, Dr. Cooper thought he was having a heart attack. At the hospital, his doctor told him he was simply out of shape, having gained 40 pounds and becoming inactive due to the stress of medical school. That first-hand experience catapulted the young doctor to lose weight and run his first marathon, the Boston Marathon, a year later.

After the publication of Aerobics, Dr. Cooper resigned from the Air Force to pursue full-time exploration of the relationship between cardiovascular fitness and health and longevity. In 1970 Dr. Cooper’s dream became a reality with the opening of the Cooper Aerobics Center in Dallas. Nearly four decades later Dr. Cooper leads 10 different health companies, a nonprofit research and education institute, and has expanded his vision by adding a second Cooper Aerobics Center at Craig Ranch in McKinney, Texas. There, CooperLife, a health and wellness residential community is under construction. A 650-person staff shares Dr. Cooper's mission to educate and encourage optimum health. Dr. Cooper's son, Tyler Cooper, M.D.,
M.P.H., has joined his father as a physician at Cooper Clinic and serves as president of CooperLife, carrying on the family legacy.

Stretching his international reach, Dr. Cooper has lectured in more than 50 countries. He is most famous in Brazil having trained the 1970 Brazilian soccer team to a World Cup victory. In Brazil, running is called "coopering" or "doing the cooper." In Hungary, the "cooperteszt" is the name of the national fitness test.

Dr. Cooper has authored 19 books, which have been translated into 41 languages and Braille and total more than 30 million copies sold. Drs. Cooper released their first-ever book as a father/son team, *Start Strong, Finish Strong* (Avery), Sept. 6, 2007, available at bookstores nationwide.

From the time of his first book, Dr. Cooper has advocated revolutionizing the field of medicine away from disease treatment to disease prevention through aerobic exercise. The Cooper philosophy, "It is easier to maintain good health through proper exercise, diet, and emotional balance than to regain it once it is lost," has been proven valid in scientific research.

Today Dr. Cooper is recognized as the leader of the international physical fitness movement and credited with motivating more people to exercise in pursuit of good health than any other person. In 1968, only 100,000 people were jogging in America. That number is now more than 30 million strong, thanks to the work and influence of Dr. Cooper.

Dr. Cooper's mark has also been felt on the American diet. His collaboration with PepsiCo and eliminating trans fats from its Frito-Lay snack line started an international wave that other companies are now following. On the back of Baked Lay's packages, you'll find this quote from Dr. Cooper, "Fitness is a journey, not a destination. It must be continued for the rest of your life."

His recent work focuses on the health and fitness of the next generation—America's youth—and fighting the childhood obesity problem. In Texas, Dr. Cooper was instrumental in getting physical education back in schools through the passage of a new law that requires enhanced PE activity levels and annual physical fitness testing. He created the OurKidsHealth Foundation to reverse the growing obesity epidemic in his home state and across the country.

Dr. Cooper is certified by the American Board of Preventive Medicine, and he has received more than 70 awards and honors including most recently the Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service; the Lifetime Achievement Award from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports; Entrepreneur of the Year (Health and Sciences, Southwest area) by Ernst & Young; and Dallas Historical Society's Excellence in Community Service Award.

At age 76 and having logged more than 38-thousand miles running, Dr. Cooper sets an example for maintaining a healthy lifestyle by exercising at the Cooper Aerobics Center on a regular basis, along with his wife Millie and their daughter Berkley and son Tyler and their families—all "coopering" for health.