



Craig C Burchess

August 22, 1947 - October 28, 2025

Craig C. Burchess, 78, of Grand Island passed away following complications after an emergency hernia surgery on October 28, 2025.

To honor Craig's wishes no service will be held. In lieu of flowers or solicitations, please consider donating your time or money to your local food bank or animal shelter.

Craig was born on August 22, 1947, in Hastings, Nebraska, the only son of Jack and Julie (McDonald) Burchess. He graduated with the Doniphan High School Class of 1965. During and after those years, Craig took on a variety of jobs that reflected his strong work ethic and adaptability—from traveling with the wheat harvest to driving a beer delivery truck in the tri-city area. These early experiences helped shape his practical mindset and steady, grounded approach to life.

He went on to pursue higher education at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where he earned his Master's degree in Education—and then some. During his college years, he met Mary Ellen "Mel" Gembala, the love of his life. They were married on May 11, 1969, and shared 57 wonderful years together until Mel's passing on March 22, 2025. Their journey as a couple began in Hastings, continued in Kearney, and eventually led them to settle in Grand Island, where they built a life filled with lasting memories.

Craig dedicated his career to teaching History and Social Studies, while also coaching Track and Football. His passion for learning never waned—he continually deepened his knowledge of both American and World History. A

forward-thinker, Craig embraced technology early on and was among the first to own a personal computer. Outside the classroom, he found joy in golfing, hunting and had a deep affection for his dogs.

Growing up on a farm west of Doniphan equipped Craig with the work ethic and versatility needed for the many part-time jobs he held throughout his teaching career; all aimed at supporting and enriching his family's life. During the summers, he worked at the Pine Street station in Grand Island and did road construction for Hooker Brothers. On weekends, he took on retail shifts at Husker Men's Wear and bartended at the Grand Island Saddle Club.

Though pragmatic by nature, Craig had a gift for infusing everyday life with meaning and connection. He introduced family, students, friends and neighbors to a wide range of cultural experiences, always finding thoughtful ways to celebrate others. Whether it was a personalized card or a small, heartfelt gesture, Craig had an unmatched ability to make people feel seen and appreciated in their moments—big or small.

After moving to Kuester Lake, Craig spent many hours working on his “hobby house” with his wife, Mel—a personal project that brought them both a sense of accomplishment and lasting memories. He was a steady presence in the lake community, and his contributions and company were genuinely appreciated.

Survived by his children, Shelia and Adam; granddaughter, Jordan and grandson, Jack; great-granddaughter, Emery; sisters, Nanci (Mike) Adams and Susie (Don) Maul and numerous other family and friends.

Craig was preceded in death by his wife, Mel; daughter, Jamie Lynne; and parents.

Tribute Wall

SM

“ *Mr. Burchess really began my love of history in high school! He ran a tight ship, but my friends and I still talk fondly about him and his class to this day. We shared many laughs with him and somehow convinced him to let us draw all over his chalk board daily. Lots of turtles riding skateboards that everyone came to look for when coming to his class... one of my favorite class memories to this day. My condolences to all his loved ones!*



Sadie M. - November 06, 2025 at 07:28 PM

LA

“ *Mr. Burchess taught my husband, our kids, and me. He had such a deep love for teaching and a true passion for history. Brilliant, funny, and full of life, he made every class memorable. My husband and I still find ourselves talking about the classes we had with him. He was truly a bright light. We are so very sorry for your loss.*
Lisa and Curtis Albers

Lisa Albers - November 04, 2025 at 05:55 PM

SB

“ *Sheila; So sorry for the loss of your father! Fond memories of You and your Father at "The Golf Course." Thoughts and Prayers! Scott Brunzell*

Scott F Brunzell - November 04, 2025 at 02:52 AM

ST

“ We're simply heartbroken to learn of Craig's passing. Kuester Lake hasn't been the same since Mel's last brisk walk with Luna and Soleil, and now - our friend Coach... Rest in peace, dear neighbor. You are missed.
Jon and Sarah Taylor

Sarah Taylor - November 02, 2025 at 09:52 PM

LD

“ Adam and Sheila-I am so sorry to hear of the loss of your dad. He and I taught together at Barr for a bunch of years until he moved to GISH. And our Adam ended up being one of the many Adams (Donaldson, Burchess, Dye, Eakes) in the same class! A story I especially remember about your dad was our Barr end of the school year party the year after the GI tornado. It was at our house on E Oklahoma and a bunch of teachers were on our back patio. A bunch of the 9th grade boys had heard where the party was and came by and threw eggs over the house onto people in back! Your dad got up and ran around the house and part way down the street chasing the car they were in!! I'll bet he scared the --- out of them!! That man could run! Anyway, I'm thinking of you and hoping you have many memories of both of your parents that bring a smile and comfort to you and your family. *Linna Dee Donaldson*

Linna Dee Donaldson - November 01, 2025 at 06:10 PM

JS

“ I had the good fortune of both teaching and coaching with Craig, although I got to know him best during track season. Craig was responsible for coaching the girls shot put and discus throw during several years of my tenure as head coach. I greatly admired his uncanny ability to identify and correct technical deficiencies. He was able to take individuals who had never participated in a throwing event and get them on the podium at the State Meet. On a lighter note, as reported by one of his athletes who was struggling in the discus throw at the State Meet, “He came over and told me to stop moping around. He told me to pull my head out of my butt and compete. I did.” The result was a gold medal throw of 124 feet, 8 inches! Like I said, Craig always knew just the right thing to say! I thoroughly enjoyed our many conversations, usually held at either the fence surrounding the shot put ring or outside the cage at the discus throw. I also got to witness first-hand the expert coaching and endless encouragement he provided his athletes. His athletes respected and greatly admired him. He always arrived early at track meets to make sure the officials knew his opinion of which discus cage to throw from, depending on wind conditions, and had a box of donuts in the back of his pickup waiting for his throwers when they arrived.

Although he had a slightly gruff exterior and never backed away from telling you exactly what he thought, those who knew him well appreciated his straight-forward honesty and valued his judgement. My heartfelt condolences and prayers for the family

Jeff Stern - November 01, 2025 at 01:36 PM