



Wayne Thomas Ray

March 24, 1943 - August 27, 2025

Dr. Wayne Thomas Ray

August 27, 2025

Dr. Wayne Thomas Ray, 82, of Russellville, passed away Aug. 27 at his home. Visitation will be held Sept. 2 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Russellville First Baptist Church, with a memorial service and celebration of his life directly following. A graveside service will be held at the Cedar Tree Cemetery in Hackleburg, Alabama.

Born March 24, 1943, he was a member of Russellville First Baptist Church where he served as deacon for many years. He attended Florence State on a football scholarship and graduated with a bachelor of science degree in secondary education. At the University of North Alabama, he worked on his administrative degrees and at Mississippi State, he received his doctorate in educational research.

He leaves to cherish his memory his wife of 60 years, Lela Wright Ray; his children, Wayne Thomas Ray, Jr. (Lajeanna), Amanda Grace Ray Rushing (Heath); Jacob Ray (Harley); Heath Rushing (Corinne), McKenna Ray Joyner (Nate); Jon Douglas Rushing, Dylan Ray (Camryn), Brayden Ray, Thomas Rushing and Carolyn Rushing; and great-grandchild, Alice Caroline Ray and many Ray, Wright and Honeycutt nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents, PJ and Reccie Cleveland Ray of Hackleburg, Alabama; and his 14 siblings: sisters – Lois Young Hughes, Mildred Penter Hire Fleming, Ruth McCall, Guynall Sanders, Ann Vickery and brothers: Carl, Shorty, Emmitt, Owen, Pete, Jimmy, Paul and Max.

Depending on the era in which you graduated from Russellville High School, “Coach Ray,” “Mr. Ray,” or “Dr. Ray,” was synonymous with Russellville City Schools. He first moved to Russellville as an assistant football coach and teacher in 1965, joining the football program that his brother, Pete, once led as head coach. Dr. Ray, a Hackleburg native, played a key role in the most successful era in Russellville football history, which included three state championships in 1966, 1967 and 1968.

He later served as head football coach of the Golden Tigers from 1973-1974 before moving into administration. He served as RHS principal until 1994 when he moved to the central office as assistant superintendent and later served as superintendent from 2000-2008. He has been recognized throughout the state of Alabama and the nation for his accomplishments.

Ray served Russellville schools for a total of 44 years in the roles of assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. As a coach, teacher and mentor he left an indelible mark on the community.

Dr. Ray was instrumental in the progress of the Russellville City Schools educational park during his tenure as superintendent and shaped countless lives through his leadership. Known for his unwavering dedication to education, he inspired students, families and colleagues alike.

During a career that spanned more than four decades, Dr. Ray’s leadership was a driving force in many key initiatives for Russellville City Schools and our

community. His entire educational career was with Russellville City Schools. To Dr. Ray, there was nothing more important than supporting Russellville and the Golden Tigers, and he lived out that philosophy on a daily basis. It's always great to be a Golden Tiger! In lieu of flowers the family request donations be made to the Dr. Wayne Ray scholarship, RCS education foundation in care of Russellville City Schools Board Of Education Office at 1945 Waterloo Road Russellville Alabama 35653.

Cemetery Details

Cedar Tree Cemetery

Hackleburg, AL

Previous Events

Visitation

SEP 2. 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church Russellville
213 North Jackson Ave.
Russellville, AL 35653

Funeral Service

SEP 2. 3:00 PM (CT)

First Baptist Church Russellville
213 North Jackson Ave.
Russellville, AL 35653

Tribute Wall



“ *Lela, you and your family are in my thoughts and prayers at this difficult time. You have started down the path where I have already begun. In time the pain of your loss will be replaced by treasured happy memories of your life together.*
Wilbur Underwood

Wilbur Underwood - August 31, 2025 at 08:57 AM

JH

“He will always be remembered as "Coach" Ray to me. After leaving school I went on to be a biology teacher and even coached one year. Many years later I was asked to write an essay answering the question, "What were the factors that led you to become a teacher?" I wrote the following tribute to Coach Ray as part of that essay:

“One teacher stands out when I consider those that had an influence on me in high school. He had a big advantage over all the other teachers because he spent more time with me than any other. Coach Wayne Ray was my Sunday School teacher, my 10th grade biology teacher, my football coach for 3 years, and my advanced biology teacher in the 12th grade. So it is no coincidence that I decided not only to teach, but also to teach biology. Details and examples of how he influenced me are a little fuzzy after many years. However, one thing in particular comes to mind. He was an encourager, always encouraging me to do my best and to never quit.

As I considered various careers and vocations in college I had numerous conversations with friends who were also struggling with the choice of a career. Several of them were entering the ministry. We spoke at length about having a calling in life, not just a job. I felt that teaching was that calling for me. Through the years I have had my doubts, my trials, and my tribulations. During those times that sense of calling and the influence of a teacher who taught me to “never quit” helped me to pull through.

Now that I am in the twilight years of my career I see that my teachers taught me more than content. They shaped my attitudes, my work ethic, and my goals. I can only hope that I have done the same for at least some of my students.”

Thank you Coach Ray!

*Jeff Hargett, RHS Class of '72
Retired Teacher*

Jeff Hargett - August 28, 2025 at 09:43 PM



The admiration I have always had for "Coach Ray" will stay with me forever. He was a great person with wisdom and compassion for all. He was an incredible "force" during my high school years. (Class of '73) I have many memories of him and Lela that I cherish. He was my cousin and role model.

I send love to Lela and his children as they navigate thru their loss. His family was the most important part of his life

With Lela being his "shining star". Thank you for being an important and integral part of my life. With much love, Hi Bedford-Roberson

Hi Roberson - August 30, 2025 at 10:28 AM

TS

Lela and family,

We were so sorry to hear about Wayne's passing. We treasure the memories we had with the Ray family. We extend sincere sympathy and prayers to you.

Blessings,

Tom and Peggy Sanders

Thomas and Peggy Sanderd - September 03, 2025 at 10:02 AM