

LETTERS

Happy birthday, Dr. Cooper!

This month will mark the 95th birthday of a man whose influence has reshaped modern life across the globe — though many Texans may not realize the magnitude of his impact. Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, the physician who coined the word *aerobics*, did far more than start a fitness movement. He changed how the world understands health itself.

Before Cooper's groundbreaking research in the 1960s, exercise was largely viewed as the domain of athletes or military training. Preventive health was not yet central to American medicine. While serving as a physician in the U.S. Air Force, Cooper demonstrated something revolutionary for its time: Consistent cardiovascular exercise could prevent disease, strengthen the heart and extend human life.

His 1968 book *Aerobics* ignited a global transformation. Jogging, fitness classes, corporate wellness programs and today's emphasis on preventive medicine all trace their roots to his work. The now-common belief that exercise is essential medicine — not merely recreation — began with Cooper's research and advocacy.

For more than half a century, through institutions he founded in Dallas, Cooper has advanced a philosophy focused not on treating illness after it appears, but on preventing it altogether. Long before "wellness" became a health care buzzword, he made lifelong health his mission.

Dallas and Texas have quietly stood at the center of this worldwide revolution. Millions of longer, healthier lives can be linked to ideas developed here in our own community. Yet unlike many innovators, Cooper's legacy has unfolded without fanfare, measured instead in stronger hearts and healthier generations.

As he turns 95, Dallas has an opportunity to recognize that we have lived in the presence of extraordinary vision and leadership. Few individuals alter global behavior in ways that endure for generations.

Cooper did exactly that — and he did it from Dallas.

*Rick Perry, Austin
Former Texas governor*