

KeizerCommunity

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From Keizer to the Big Apple

By **CRAIG MURPHY**
Of the *Keizertimes*

Keizer native Steven Kirby was hoping to land a full-time job with the city.

It didn't happen.

Don't feel too sorry for the 2010 McNary High School graduate, however. After all, he now has a full-time job working for a city you may have heard of before: New York City.

Yes, Kirby is working in the New York City Parks Department.

On the surface, it may seem like quite the leap to go from interning at the City of Keizer in the summer of 2013 to getting a job in this country's biggest city.

Below the surface, however, it's not so surprising.

After all, between graduating from MHS and his spring 2014 graduation from the University of Oregon, Kirby completed internships in Washington D.C. for Oregon senator Jeff Merkley, plus he interned in the state governor's office the same summer he became Keizer City Manager Chris Eppley's first intern. He was profiled in the *Keizertimes* at that time for his role.

Now he's on a bigger stage.

Kirby said he heard about the New York City Parks

Following and Conservation program during his last year at O, thanks to a former student who had been in the program the year before.

"I had this weird urge to live in New York," Kirby said. "This was a perfect opportunity to live in New York. There were 700 people who applied for this program and I was one of 30 lucky enough to be chosen."

Kirby moved to New York last September, originally rooming with MHS friend Davis Jones, who has since landed a job in San Diego.

"I work in government relations office for the parks," said Kirby, whose office in the Arsenal building overlooks famed Central Park. "I'm a liaison between New York City parks and any elected officials, state assembly, senate or council. Anything political, I deal with it."

Originally Kirby's appointment was slated to end in June. In March, however, he was hired on full-time.

"It's now the same job, just permanent. I'll be sticking around a little while. It's fun living out here. It's a little bit different than Keizer, believe it or not," Kirby said with a laugh.

It took Kirby a few weeks to get adjusted to living in



Submitted
Former City of Keizer intern Steven Kirby, seen here with New York's skyline in the background, now works for The Big Apple's Parks Department.

a city of more than eight million people.

"It is funny now how normal everything seems here in the city," he said. "For the first month I was shocked by the pace. Now I get up, get on the subway and get to the office. I've been out here eight months now. It feels more normal now."

At Christmastime Kirby spent some time in Keizer, visiting friends and doing typical things like driving around to see the Keizer Miracle of Christmas Lights display in the Gubser neighborhood.

"I thought at Christmas Keizer would feel so weird and different," Kirby said. "But I lived there 18 years. I immediately felt comfortable and home. I could live here (in NYC) 50 years and still say I'm an Oregonian. When

I came back here, I thought I would feel shock and the scale. But this feels familiar now. It's not as drastic as I once thought."

Just how familiar does NYC feel for Kirby? Let's put it this way: he gets high praise for his tour guide skills from his dad.

"I think it's great," Mike Kirby said of his son's job in New York. "He's always wanted to live in a big city. He wants to be there. He's done a good job with the city. Good for him. Plus he's a great tour guide. He can get us around town really well."

Mike Kirby and other family members plan to take another visit later this spring. Even though they're in different parts of the country, Mike is clearly proud of his son.

"He's done well here and back there as well," Mike Kirby said. "We're pleased about that, of course. That's what you want him to do. He's tried a variety of things and done well."

Steven Kirby said such support means a lot.

"I feel very fortunate with the opportunities I've been given," he said. "I have the most loving support system with my parents, my brother and my friends. My parents and brother are 100 percent behind me. I wouldn't have this without the opportunities people like my parents and Chris Eppley gave me."

When Kirby interned for Eppley in 2013, he termed it a "city government fantasy camp" and indicated he wanted to work at a city level after having also seen the inside workings of state and federal government.

"In Keizer you have finance, planning and public works all in one big building,"

Kirby. "In New York City, each department has a different building. Interning in Keizer gave me a feel for what city government feels like. It's different here, but yet it's the same feel. Chris really gave me opportunities to work with different facets of the city. I have been able to translate that here. I worked on independent projects for Chris like the city survey, which really helped. Now we're rolling out an initiative in city parks here. It's the same service, but obviously a lot more. It's on a bigger scale. The root of the foundation is the same, but you're talking about eight million people versus 38,000."

Hearing about Kirby's update wasn't much of a shock to Eppley.

"He was a great intern and we all really enjoyed having him here," Eppley said. "It's no surprise to me that he's doing well in New York."

Even though he's across the country from home, Kirby still has reminders of home. For example, the first several months in the Big Apple meant living with Jones, a friend from his McNary days.

"That made the transition easier, having a good friend from high school here," Kirby said.

Kirby also felt he needed a Keizer connection in his office, so about a month ago he got a photo of the Keizer Civic Center to go next to a big Celt.

"Now I see Keizer every day at my desk," he said.

Of course, that's not all Kirby sees at his desk.

"Our office is within Central Park, right next to the Central Park Zoo," he said. "I can see the sea lion tank from my desk. If I get bored, I can lean back and look to the right and see sea lions."

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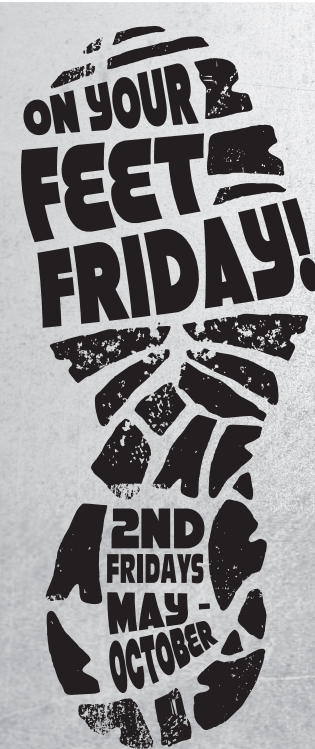
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