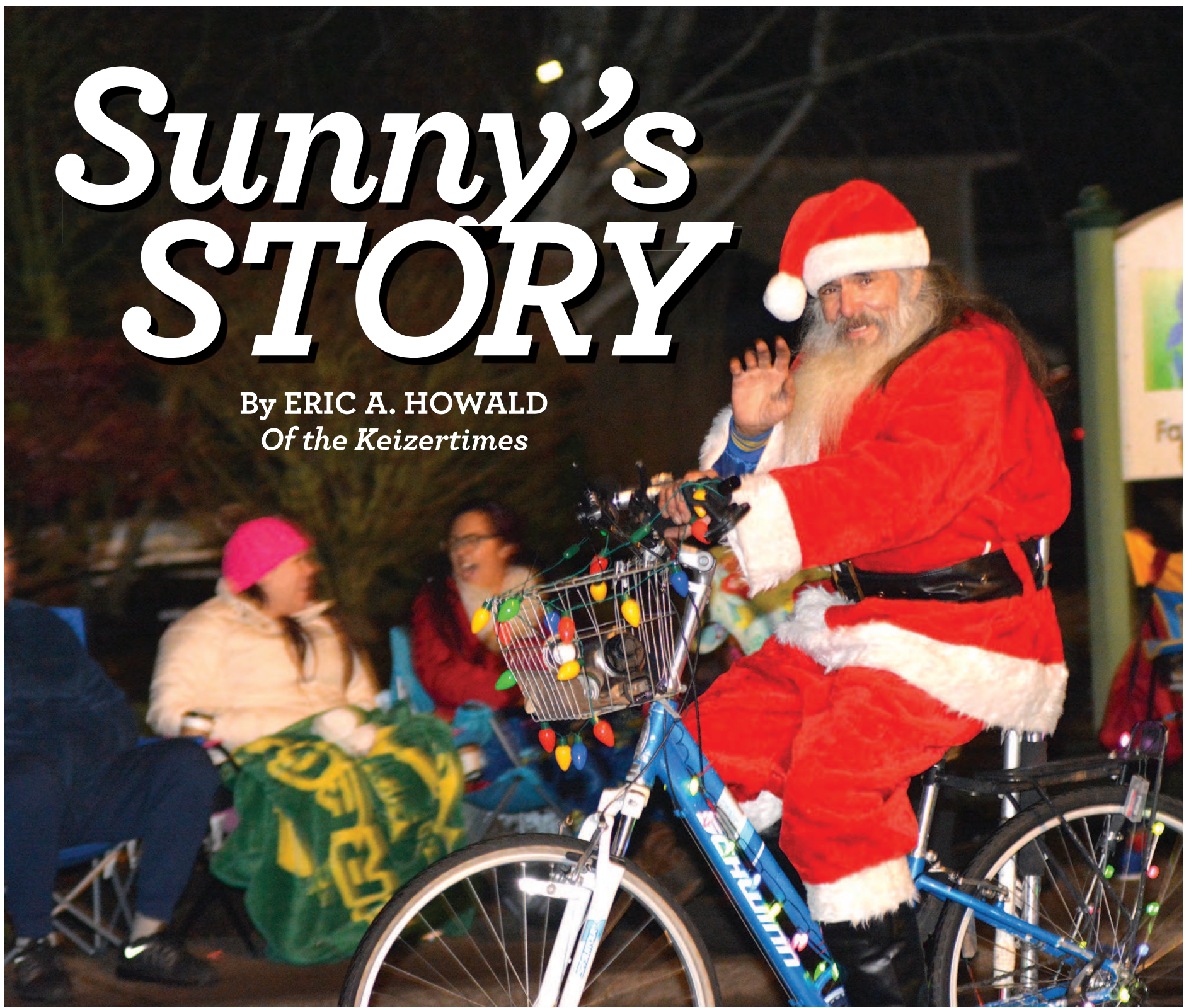


# Sunny's STORY

By ERIC A. HOWALD  
Of the Keizertimes



Sunny thinks you're beautiful. The same way Keanu Reeves thinks you're breathtaking.

"Keizer is a beautiful place, the people who live here are beautiful. That's why I try to pick up after everybody," Sunny said.

Sunny has the same quiet, magnanimous vibe as his more famous counterpart exudes in seemingly every interaction.

Keizer residents are just as likely to spot Sunny pedaling along River Road North, panhandling either next to Shari's or at the Interstate 5 off ramps, hauling another load of useful items he found at a neighborhood garage sale or even picking up trash in public spaces. In a town seen as unforgiving by some in the shelterless community, Sunny earned a pass.

He's almost always willing to engage a stranger in conversation and selfies with him pop up on local social media networks with surprising regularity. When he is panhandling, there's always an element of gratitude for the assistance and kindnesses he receives.

A few months ago, he made headlines for interfering with another man's verbal harassment and attempted assault of a sandwich shop employee.

He's made several signs to indicate to

drivers that their car may be in need of some repair or other. A few months ago, my wife exited the north I-5 off-ramp and spotted Sunny shuffling through his signs, as she drove by. Sunny's sign her know that one of her headlights had burnt out. After the 2019 holiday lights parade, *Keizertimes* ran a front page photo of him making the rounds as Santa on a bike. Weeks later, I arrived at the office to find five pages of a pocket notepad on the floor just inside the door. It was a note from Sunny thanking us for noticing him in such a grand way. The note he wrote our staff, and others he's penned that were posted to social media, are achingly sincere.

Sunny said he relearned how to read, in part, by picking up week-old editions of the *Keizertimes* out of recycling receptacles. He had to relearn how to walk,

Sunny, who lives shelterless in the Keizer community, rides down River Road Santa as Santa in the 2019 holiday light parade.

FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

how to speak and how to write after a devastating motorcycle accident about 20 years ago.

I would take a bullet for any one of the officers in this town.

— SUNNY

"I had bought the bike off a friend who made a huge mistake and was going to jail. He needed money for his family and he said the bike was worth \$50,000. I gave him \$10,000 and told him the bike

would be waiting for him when he got out," Sunny said.

The bike always seemed more powerful than he could handle, he said. Catastrophe struck when he ended up on a rural highway between Keizer and McMinnville. As he rode, a driver in front of him began "playing games," brake checking and fishtailing the car when he tried to pass. When he did make it past, he sped up to increase the distance between the two vehicles. He was checking his mirror to see if the other driver had given up and wasn't paying attention to the road in front of him, or the cars that had come to a stop at a signal.

He swerved to avoid the back-up and went off the road. Everything that came next was brief and painful. He hit one sign and flew off the bike, he remembers being suspended in the air and looking around, then he hit another sign. There was another brief stoppage of time and then he hit the ground. He whipped himself to one side of a chair and then the other as he recollected the incident, opening alternating eyes wide to exaggerate what he felt in the moment.

Serendipity appears to have played a major role in his survival.