Community News

Community gathers for one last wave goodbye

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DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Area residents left remembrances for the smiles and waves shared by Clarence Kreamier, who was known for brightening peoples' days from his spot near the corner of 16th and Main streets.

Clarence Kreamier, also known as the "Cottage Grove Waver," passed away April 17 at age 70, leaving behind a legacy of happiness and goodwill with a community he loved to make smile.

"He was always that guy that if you made him smile, you made his day," said his daughter Nancy Kreamier.

Clarence was born in Riverside, Calif., and joined the U.S. Army Artillery, serving in Vietnam from Sept. 1969 to May 1974.

When he returned, he married and started a family, spending some time in Arkansas before moving to Oregon.

About 10 years ago, he followed Nancy to Cottage Grove, where she had spent a year struggling to make ends meet.

"When I lost my apartment, he got a place with me and helped me raise the kids for a good three years," Nancy said. "He paid first, last, deposits. He co-signed, went primary on the house."

Clarence stayed with his daughter until she was back on her feet.

"He was always just that standard foundation," Nancy recalled. Not just for his family, but for everyone around him, "He was the go-to guy. You need a deck built, you need this, you need that, you need help — he was the person you called. He was always that generous person that was trying to help someone out."

About five years ago, after a heart attack which required intense surgery, Clarence was under the home care of Nancy and her mother — until one day, he disappeared.

"He took off on me and my mom like a week-and-a-half after being home. He split," Nancy said. "Next thing we know, he's down here on the corner waving at everybody. … And when we catch up with him, he's telling me, 'All these people are always so angry and they never smile. All I wanted to do was get a honk and a wave.'"

Though seemingly random, Nancy said it fell right in line with Clarence's love of spreading joy. "He was just drawn to it," she said. "Every time we'd turn around, he'd take off and be right back up at that corner."

It was when Clarence moved into a house just down the street fromthe corner of 16th and Main streets that he really picked up the pace and, for the last three years, has a been a regular fixture on the corner, decked in bright patriotic colors and an equally bright disposition.

Though some people figured him for a panhandler and tried to give him money, Clarence would never accept it.

"For him, that made his day," said Nancy. "Just making people happy and being around people that were happy."

Nancy recounted one story her father had told her about why he kept going back. A woman and her husband once approached him and told him they had been fighting a lot lately. But, the woman said, "For some reason, when I wave to you, it just brightens my day. So when I go home, we just stop fighting. We started talking to each other."

Clarence's daughter remembers her father being a big advocate of "leaving work at work, and leaving home at home." Knowing that his streetside cheerfulness could in some way be helpful in that was enough fuel to keep him going out there.

Although Nancy knew he was affecting people's lives, she had never suspected the true extent of his impact until social media erupted with stories following his passing.

"Just the simple act of kindness and smile, it kind of rubbed off on people and kind of followed them home," she said. "It's something I hope the community still holds on to. That simple kindness … pay it forward. … That would carry on his legacy."

Clarence's legacy may very well live on in a very tangible way. In honoring his memory, the city has donated a bench and secured permission from the landowner at Clarence's corner, Ernie Olson, to install the bench by the end of the week. The bench was commissioned to be painted by Golnrod Graphix owner Rod Lundy and inscribed with a dedication to Clarence.

Support has also been pouring in from the community as Nancy has made burial and memorial preparations for her father. After the Clarence Kreamier Memorial Fund account was established at Banner Bank, donations quickly came in from the innumerable people touched by Clarence's joy.

"The community has been so great. I can't believe the rallying support," she said. "I can't put into words how thankful I am."

As of press time, the fund had just reached its $1,310 goal to cover memorial expenses.

The public celebration of life and potluck will be held at 11 a.m. on May 4 at Delight Valley Church of Christ, 33087 Saginaw Rd. East and will give attendees an opportunity to share memories or leave statements with Clarence.

"It's going to be a chance for the community to be interactive with his ceremony — his celebration of life," Nancy said.

A private military service will be held for Clarence as well.

Nancy hopes the contagious nature of her father's joy will have a lasting effect on the community.

"His life was spreading kindness. And if we could spread kindness in a small gesture every day, we'll give a piece of him life still," she said. "It's amazing what just a simple smile and kindness can do."

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Meet
JEVIN HAINES

Jevin is a graduate of Cottage Grove High School. He has 8 years of GM Service experience and enjoys riding his motorcycle and having fun.

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