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No Place Like Home

Ron and Marsha Willis connect with the past in their historic Church Street home

Christmas Capers

The history behind this unusual tradition involving chickens

The Glow of Christmas

Noble Passage spreads Christmas cheer in downtown Madison

Here comes Santa Claus

Jolly Old Saint Nicholas is checking it twice for his annual return





PEOPLE

HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS

With years of portraying Santa under his belt,
Gary Knight is still checking it twice

STORY BY ERIN COGGINS
PHOTOS BY FLY LEAF PHOTOGRAPHY



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Red suit. Check.

Shiny black boots. Check.

White beard. Check.

Christmas magic. Check.

It is this simple checklist that transforms Gary Knight into Santa Gary around November of every year.

“I usually trim my beard back after Christmas and then start growing it back out in May,” Knight said. “It usually takes me an hour to get in full Santa mode. I do not have to do anything to my hair as, like my mother, I turned prematurely white starting in my early 20’s so that by the time I was 35 years old, I was pretty much white headed.”

Knight first portrayed the North Pole Boss in the early 1970’s while stationed at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia. His wife at the time constructed his red Santa suit for his appearance at the bases’ PX store.

“I took two white wigs and wore one on my head and one on my face as a beard. It was pretty funny, but it actually did not look terrible, and the kids seemed to love it,” Knight said. “My oldest daughter was just over 1-years-old at the time, and I was able to see her experience of Santa firsthand and it was great.”

Twenty-five years passed before Knight donned a Santa costume again. He was in his 40’s when he accepted the part to play the Spirit of Christmas Present with the Fantasy Playhouse Children’s Theater’s production of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol”, a role he continued for five years. In 1998, he played Kris Kringle in a local production of “Miracle on 34th Street.”

Besides theater, commercials and working with various photography studios around North and Middle Alabama, Knight has portrayed Santa for Bridge Street Town Center since the shopping center opened in 2007. His eighteenth season kicked off on Nov. 22 with the lighting of the Christmas tree and he will be there in his full Father Christmas Victorian style long coat on the weekends starting Nov. 29 through Christmas Eve.

Including the Victorian style Father Christmas attire, Knight has five other looks, including a wool woodland long coat, a white with gold embroidery elegant coat, the standard “Twas the Night Before Christmas’ suit and the Santa on vacation suit with a



