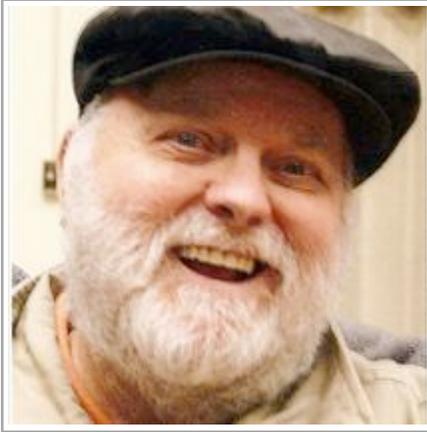


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David L. Estes, retired deputy sheriff and Santa Claus

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Reported by: [Stephanie Smith](#)

Web produced by: [Kerry Duke](#)

David L. Estes spent all year--every year--preparing for his transformation to Santa Claus, when he would play the jolly old elf all month long during the holiday season.

"He always cut his beard the day after Christmas, then grew it all the following year. It'd get real thick and bushy," said his wife of 50 years, Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Book Estes. "And he had a big belly. Didn't have to use a pillow (for padding)."

"I would play Mrs. Claus," his wife said. ""When he couldn't make it to everything (because of his health)--couldn't see as well--I would dress up as Mrs. Claus and drive him around."

Mr. Estes of Erlanger died Friday at St. Luke Hospital West, Florence. He was 74.

"He was busy all December being Santa," said his wife, who told how the pair would make appearances at various organizations around Northern Kentucky, including senior citizens centers, day care centers, the Lions, FOPs and private parties.

"Not one time did he ever accept one cent," his wife of their holiday activities. "He'd always say, 'This is my gift to you. If you really want to do something, donate to the American Red Cross or to your church. I just do this because I really enjoy it.'"

Mr. Estes also enjoyed participating in the Shop with a Cop program during the holidays.

"He always did Shop with a Cop," said his wife. "He loved that. He was so touched by some of the parents of these children. Those cops do wonderful things with that (group)."

Mr. Estes worked as an employee with Cross Hines for 34 years before the company moved to California.

"Neither one of us wanted to go because of family," said his wife.

Mr. Estes then became a deputy sheriff with the Kenton County Sheriff's Department, retiring after 12 years.

"He worked in the courtroom, but was asked if he wanted to go out on the road," said his wife. "He was the oldest one in their training program down in Eastern Kentucky, and always got good marks on his yearly tests."

Mr. Estes also was an Army veteran and a member of St. Henry Church, Elsmere.

"We had 50 years of good memories. He was my buddy. I'll miss him terribly," said his wife.

Additional survivors include sons, Jeffrey David Estes of Jonesville, Andrew Douglas Estes of Erlanger, Robert L. Estes of Independence, and Daniel C. Estes of Florence; daughters, Cynthia Ann Gosney and Mary Michelle Winans, both of Elsmere; a sister, Donna Lindsey of Ludlow; and seven grandchildren.

Mass of Christian burial will be at 10 a.m. Tuesday at St. Henry Church, Elsmere. Visitation will begin there at 9 a.m. Tuesday. Burial will be in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Erlanger.

Memorials are suggested to the Erlanger/Elsmere F.O.P., P.O. Box 18066, Erlanger, Ky. 41018.

Chambers and Grubbs Funeral Home, Florence, is handling the arrangements.

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