

Death stills the heart of man who was Santa

Phil Kearney, better-known as Santa Claus to scores of Pajaro Valley children, died Monday of a heart attack at his Aptos home, it was learned today. He was 45.

For nearly a decade, until he gave it up a couple of years ago, Mr. Kearney was Santa at Ford's Department store.

Mr. Kearney, a design engineer for IBM, took time off every year from his work to play the role of Santa.

"Phil played many a stage role, but the one he loved most was that of Santa for which he was aptly suited, standing at six-three and weighing more than 300 pounds," his brother Ken said.

George Menasco, president of Ford's, said Mr. Kearney was extremely good with children. "He spoke their language," he said.

Mr. Kearney was a graduate in 1954 of Watsonville High School. After a hitch in the Navy, he enrolled in drama school at San Jose State College, and later he was in demand for stage productions, especially in the San Jose area.

He was also a stamp collector and lover of classical music, an avid historian and was regarded by his friends as a fine cook.

He leaves his wife, Phyllis, a hospital vocational nurse, and four sons, Phil, Andrew, Dion and Duncan.

Final arrangements were made by the Neptune Society.

Phil Kearney more than anything enjoyed his role of Santa Claus (top photo); as dressed for role on the stage (right)

