

Sunday Is Jim's Funeral

1976
(Again)

He's Hoping He'll Last

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Jim Gernhart, of Burlington, Colo., hopes he doesn't die before his funeral Sunday.

"I don't want to disappoint people,"

said the 99-year-old man who has held more than 20 funerals for himself in the past quarter century.

Sunday some of the people in Burlington who have gotten a kick out of Gernhart's irreverent coffin shenanigans over the years, will honor him with what is supposed to be a 100th birthday funeral parade.

But Gernhart doesn't turn 100 until Nov. 20. "He's getting a little old," explained one of the parade-funeral organizers "and we're afraid he might not even be around then."

IT WAS IN 1951 when Gernhart won national fame for himself by staging his first funeral. He bought a copper casket, rented the local armory and blew more

than \$15,000 on the funeral party which attracted nationwide publicity.

Gernhart, a retired farmer, was worried that he wouldn't get a proper burial after he was gone, so he staged his own. It was such a big hit he staged funerals every year, prompting the mayor of Burlington to remark "his funeral is the biggest thing that happens here."

In recent years the funerals have missed a year here and there and Gernhart has sold his home and moved to a Burlington rest home.

He's had his copper casket shipped to a mausoleum awaiting his actual demise in Goodland, Kan. There was so much citizen outcry against his first funeral—before everybody realized what a swell

time they had—that he made plans to be buried elsewhere. "I wouldn't be caught dead in Burlington," he quipped.

Sunday's funeral will be staged by 75 or so "damn, crazy fools," said one of Gernhart's stubborn admirers who asked not to be named.

PLANS ARE UNDERWAY for an antique car procession through town. The whole thing gets under way at 2:30 p.m.

Reached by phone at the local rest home, Gernhart said he spends most of his time these days, when not planning funerals "just killing time."

He says "there should be a good crowd" for his 100th birthday funeral and that "anybody can come who wants to."

When his first funeral was staged, news accounts noted Gernhart had \$75,000. It prompted calls from lonely hearts widows and others seeking a share.

But one funeral organizer said this week "everybody's always thought he had a lot of money, but I guess his money will run out about the same time he does."

Whenever that is, Jim Gernhart hopes it isn't before he gets one more slice of life out of death.