



Times photos by April Gregory, agregory@stcloudtimes.com

Garrison Keillor will be presenting "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show at Lake Wobegon Park in Avon this Saturday. City staff met today to discuss preparations. For more on the show, turn to Up Next.

AVON PREPS FOR KEILLOR'S SHOW

Former area resident returns for 35th anniversary broadcast on the Fourth of July

By Adam Hammer
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AVON — One thing is clear about Saturday's national broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" live from Avon: No one knows just what to expect.

"We're dubbing it 'Prairie-stock' because we have no idea," said local event coordinator Colleen Petters, making reference to the similar uncertainty of 1969's Woodstock. "It's a great unknown."

With the influx of people coming to town — estimated at about three times the population of Avon — for Garrison Keillor's 35th anniversary,

Fourth of July broadcast, it is quickly becoming an event drawing support from the overall community.

"Amazingly, the city has been so supportive ... on the heels of Spunk-tacular Days," Petters said.

The show will take place rain or shine, but will be called off if there is lightning. The forecast calls for a 30 percent chance of thunderstorms.

Numerous volunteers, businesses, artisans, musicians, police officers and safety personnel are coming together with just a few weeks notice to bring Keillor home to Lake Wobegon.

"It should be a pretty interesting

48 hours," said Doug Millaway, Avon Area Arts committee member.

Lake Wobegon country

Keillor said the show that people had been urging him to do for the 35th anniversary was a star-studded event in a large city like New York, Los Angeles or Chicago.

"I didn't want to do that. I'm from Minnesota and we're not big on self-promotion. We don't like the idea of inviting people to come to say wonderful things about us," Keillor said. "It just gives me a queasy feeling that

See KEILLOR, 2B ▶

Police strategize for Avon-bound travelers

By Kari Petrie
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AVON — Avon Police Chief Corey Nellis is concerned about two things as thousands of Garrison Keillor fans ascend on his town Saturday.

Parking and pedestrian traffic.

"(Drivers need to) slow down and pay attention," Nellis said.

About 4,000 people are expected in Avon for the live broadcast of the 35th anniversary edition of "A Prairie Home Companion." The police department was

given only three weeks to plan how it would handle all those visitors.

"We don't know what to expect," Nellis said.

He hopes pedestrian traffic will be OK. There are likely going to be so many vehicles driving through town that speeds won't be able to get up too high.

And parking, well, he has a plan and hopes there will be enough of it. This week the number of anticipated audience members doubled

See SAFETY, 2B ▶



Officer Casey Jansky discusses how to handle parking for the "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show in Avon at a meeting in Avon City Hall on Wednesday.

FROM PAGE 1B

Keillor

I would put on a show about myself.

"But to put on a show in Avon, it seemed to me that would really be noble so people around the country could hear voices from Stearns County."

Keillor lived in the area and starting his radio broadcast career when he came up with the idea for "A Prairie Home Companion" and its fictional hometown of Lake Wobegon.

Keillor said he was sold on the idea of doing a broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" from Avon once he learned from the show's technical crew that they could get Integrated Services Digital Network phone lines to the site.

"When the tech guys said it was feasible, that was all I needed to hear. So here we go," Keillor said.

Arts presence

Avon Area Arts, a local arts organization started in 2007, quickly got together to make its presence known after hearing the news two weeks ago that the show was coming to town.

"It allows us to capture an audience that we wouldn't normally have," Millaway said. "We'll be able to show them that our organization in this small town is capable of some pretty large things."

The group rounded up about 25 volunteers to help set up and tear down the stage and direct parking. It also pulled together a half-dozen musicians who will

MORE IN UP NEXT

Read more about Garrison Keillor's appearance in Up Next this week.

perform in front of Aunt Annie's Quilts & Silks and Avon State Bank from 1-4 p.m. while eventgoers are waiting for the show to begin at 5 p.m.

Aunt Annie's also will be open until 4 p.m.

"I think the word is already getting out that Avon is a strong arts community," said Lucy Senstad, Aunt Annie's owner and fabric artist.

The quilt shop doubles as a live music venue, regularly featuring national and international touring musicians such as Ray Bonneville, David Olney and Pieta Brown, who will perform there in the next month.

Although the arts organization is still young and growing, helping out with the "Prairie Home Companion" broadcast should dispel any doubts of the strength of the organization, Senstad said.

"We kind of had an inkling (Keillor) would want to do something here, but this is huge as a national broadcast," Millaway said.

Low-key park event

Lake Wobegon Park, located along the Lake Wobegon Trail bike path at Avon Avenue North and Second Street Northeast, will open at 1 p.m. and Millaway expects that people will park their chairs and go looking for activities to pass the time.

Among the local street performers will be Jake Braking, Collective Uncon-

"We'll be able to show them that our organization in this small town is capable of some pretty large things."

Doug Millaway,

Avon Area Arts committee member

scious, Dave Cofell, John Wilber and others.

Fisher's Club, which Keillor owns with Petters' husband, Jon, will supply food along with other area vendors.

"We have been trying to keep it local, Lake Wobegon," Colleen Petters said.

Pulled pork sandwiches, hot dogs, ice cream cones, sloppy joes, bratwurst, hamburgers, walleye sandwiches and Fisher's Club's Beepopareebop Rhubarb Pie and Powdermilk Biscuit-Strawberry Shortcake are on the menu, Petters said. The pie and shortcake names are adapted from regular references used in Keillor's "Prairie Home" scripts.

The Village Bean will be open and serving coffee until 7 p.m. and will have a vendor booth set up at the park.

Once news of the event got out, Petters said vendors from nearby and far away called and asked if they could set up at the event. Many were rejected in an attempt to maintain the small-town appeal of having "A Prairie Home Companion" broadcast from Lake Wobegon country, she said.

FROM PAGE 1B

Safety

from 2,000 to 4,000.

City officers have gotten calls from all over the country from people wanting more information about the event. Nellis said one man from Arizona came into the police department looking for information; he had driven up just to watch the show.

Several sites throughout the city will be set aside for parking. Stearns County Mounted Patrol Reserve Officers will be on hand to help facilitate parking.

Avon and Albany officers and volunteer reserve officers

Despite the headaches of trying to plan for such an event in such a short time, Nellis said it isn't all bad.

will be directing traffic, and Avon Fire and Rescue members will be on hand in case of medical emergencies.

And who is going to pay for those officers working overtime on a holiday that happens to fall on a weekend? The city plans to send a bill to the show's producers.

Despite the headaches of trying to plan for such an event in such a short time, Nellis said it isn't all bad.

"It's a great event for the community," he said.

WHERE TO WATCH 'PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION'

