



Associated Press

Garrison Keillor plans to step down from 'A Prairie Home Companion' next season.

Keillor to leave 'Prairie' in 2016

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Garrison Keillor, creator and longtime host of the popular "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show, says he means it this time: He's retiring.

In an interview Monday, Keillor said he plans to step down as host after next season, following four decades of entertaining listeners with his baritone voice and folksy comedy sketches about Lake Wobegon, his mythical Minnesota hometown "where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average."

The show is heard by 4 million listeners nationwide on nearly 700 public radio stations each week. Keillor also takes summer bus tours for live shows, and his 30-city "America the Beautiful" cross-country tour, billed as his farewell tour, starts next week.

"I have a lot of other things that I want to do. I mean, nobody retires anymore. Writers never retire. But this is my last season. This tour this summer is the farewell tour," the 72-year-old Keillor said, laughing and joking as he sat in his book-lined office in St. Paul wearing his signature red socks.

Keillor said he tapped musician Chris Thile of the bands Punch Brothers and Nickel Creek to succeed him full-time as host in September 2016, following guest-hosting spots. He said Thile, a mandolin whiz, will help return "Prairie Home" to its roots as a music show.

Keillor said his final show

as host will be in July 2016, from the Tanglewood auditorium in Massachusetts, one of Keillor's favorite locations for broadcasts.

The Berkshire (Massachusetts) Eagle first reported last month on Keillor's plans to "transition" out of the show. But given Keillor's history — he talked about retiring when he turned 70 in 2013 — many media outlets were cautious. The Minneapolis Star Tribune noted Keillor had "announced an upcoming retirement so many times that he could be called the Brett Favre of broadcast radio."

But he insisted Monday that his decision was solid. He said he plans to stay on as executive producer, but only "an admirer" and "a gray eminence" of the on-air show, which he said will keep its Midwestern focus.

"I'm perfectly willing to do whatever needs to be done. I can certainly come on the show as a guest, you know, I can do the warm-up. I can stand in the wings and wind up microphone cord," Keillor said.

Keillor said that means retiring his weekly monologue, "News from Lake Wobegon," a homey recounting of the doings of Norwegian bachelor farmers and other Lake Wobegon residents, along with his sketches about hard-boiled detective Guy Noir and hapless modern-day cowboys Dusty and Lefty.

As for retirement, Keillor has a few plans, including traveling.