

SCANDAL HITS 'HOME'

MPR drops Keillor, Prairie Home, citing inappropriate conduct

In his hometown, a mix of shock and disappointment.

By JOHN REINAN
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The mythical Lake Wobegon may be in central Minnesota, but everyone knows it has a lot of Anoka in it.

And in Garrison Keillor's hometown, news of his abrupt firing Wednesday over sexual harassment charges was stirring up "very turbulent feelings," as one resident put it.

"He was always one of those people we pointed to with pride," said Patricia Joy, who was five years behind Keillor in high school. As word of his sudden dismissal spread, Joy said, "I started getting e-mails and texts from family members, saying, 'Oh, no — not Garrison!'"

"These were people you looked up to and respected," added Joy, citing Keillor as well as "Today" host Matt Lauer and a growing list of powerful men felled by harassment charges. "We're all like, who's next?"

Across the café table, Joy's mother, 91-year-old Earline Martin, shook her head in disgust.

"These men, they're something else," she said. "And what about President Trump?" she asked, referring to multiple charges of sexual harassment that the president has denied.

At Billy's Bar & Grill, the mostly middle-aged male patrons were more understanding of Keillor's plight. The outpouring of harassment stories from women has left them feeling as if long-held patterns of behavior are being suddenly upended.

"I'm not taking all this at face value from these gals," said Anthony Gerster. "We've gotten to a point in American culture where you can't flirt with someone. It's gotten to the point where I'm afraid to talk to someone in the workplace."

"That's my take, and I know a lot of people who feel the same way."

Jack Peterson agreed. "If he did it, he did it," Peterson said. "But it's a bad state of

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Garrison Keillor, here in 2016, described the incident: "I put my hand on a woman's bare back."

Saying he may move, Keillor sees nation in the "grip of a mania."

By NEAL JUSTIN
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Garrison Keillor, whose soothing voice and gentle humor helped define the world's view of Minnesota, has been dropped by Minnesota Public Radio for "inappropriate behavior" toward a co-worker.

MPR said Wednesday it is severing all ties to the longtime host of radio's "A Prairie Home Companion." The show, which he handed off last year to hand-picked successor Chris Thile, will be retitled — Keillor holds the trademark — and his old broadcasts no longer will be aired.

Officials at the network would not comment beyond a statement saying they were notified last month of allegations relating to Keillor's conduct while he was responsible for producing "PHC."

"I put my hand on a woman's bare back," he told the Star Tribune by e-mail minutes after MPR's statement. "I meant to pat her back after she told me about her unhappiness and her shirt was open and my hand went up it about six inches. She recoiled. I apologized. I sent her an email of apology later and she replied that she had forgiven me and not to think about it. We were friends. We continued to be friendly right up until her lawyer called."

The 75-year-old humorist who helped make MPR a powerhouse seemed more hurt, resigned and defensive than apologetic.

"It's astonishing that 50 years of hard work can be trashed in a morning by an accusation," he said in a Facebook post Wednesday evening. "I always believed in hard work and now it feels sort of meaningless. Only a friend can hurt you this badly. I think I have to leave the country in order to walk around in public and not feel accusing glances."

He later deleted that public comment and then, in a post

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MORE COVERAGE INSIDE

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Longtime "Today" host faces allegations of sexual assault, misconduct. **A6**



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Michigan Democrat says he'll fight female aides' harassment charges. **A6**

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2017

MPR FIRES GARRISON KEILLOR

STAR TRIBUNE • A7

KEILLOR'S E-MAIL TO STAR TRIBUNE

I'm doing fine. Getting fired is a real distinction in broadcasting and I've waited fifty years for the honor...

EXCERPT FROM MPR'S STATEMENT

Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) is terminating its contracts with Garrison Keillor and his private media companies after recently learning of allegations of his inappropriate behavior...

"I'm in shock. I know nothing beyond what's contained in the statement below, but I trust that the proper steps are being taken."

"Prairie Home Companion" host Chris Thile on Twitter



The headline ticker on Minnesota Public Radio's headquarters in downtown St. Paul bore the news Wednesday afternoon as the station reported on itself.

Scandal hits 'Prairie Home'

KEILLOR from Al... similar allegations involving other staff, but the investigation is still ongoing.

MPR details its decision... Although he stepped away from 'Prairie Home's' Keillor retained a producer credit and continued to record his daily features.

'Prairie Home' history... MPR was just two years old in 2009 when its founder, Bill King, hired Keillor as an announcer.

Colman defending Franken... Coincidentally, Keillor defended Minnesota Sen. Al Franken in a syndicated column this week after Lou Agosti...

TIMELINE

- Aug. 7, 1942: Born in Anoka.
1965: Wed to Mary Gunt-son. Son, Jason, is born in 1969. They divorce in 1976.
1966: Graduates from University of Minnesota, where he starts his radio career at what is now known as Radio K.
1974: First broadcast of 'A Prairie Home Companion' from Maclester College in St. Paul.
1979: First national live broadcast from University of Minnesota's Northrop Auditorium.
1985: Attacks the cover of Time magazine. Marries Ulla Stearns, a dance who was an exchange student when he attended Anoka High School.
1987: Broadcasts what he says is the final 'PHC' move to Denmark with his wife to focus on writing.
1989: Launches new variety series, 'The American Radio Company of the Air,' based in New York City.
1992: He and Stearns divorce.
1992: Brings the show back to St. Paul. Reclaims 'Prairie Home' title the following year.
1994: Inducted into Radio Hall of Fame.
1995: Marries Minnesota Opera vocalist Jenny Lind Simons. They have a daughter, Mia.
1999: Marks the show's silver anniversary with a five CD set of monologues and music.
2001: Undergoes open-heart surgery at Mayo Clinic.
2006: Begins syndicated newspaper columns.
2006: Opens Common Good Books in St. Paul.
2009: Suffers minor stroke. Returns to work a few days later.
2011: Rekindles hosting duties for the first time, handing the baton to frequent guest Sara Watkins.
2015: Says he'll step down as host, announcing Chris Thile is successor.
July 1, 2016: President Obama poses in his final 'PHC' at the Holywood Bowl.
Nov. 29, 2017: Citing 'inappropriate behavior with an individual who worked with him,' MPR terminates its relationship with Keillor.

In Anoka and St. Paul, news met with shock, disappointment

REACTION from Al... "They know if they don't cut these guys loose, they've got a problem," he said.

Cloner to Keillor's St. Paul residence and business, opinions were similarly divided. Carol Ann Pederson, who works near the Keillor-owned Common Good Books, said she has met the public radio star and seen his live show. She was "disappointed" to hear about the allegations against him.

the downtown St. Paul theater that was its home base. They were "shocked" about Keillor's firing. Al Maclester College, where the first "Prairie Home Companion" shows originated in 1974, student Aberdeen McVern had heard the allegations, but said the college is "proud to be across from the bookstore" and to be associated with Keillor.