



Staff Photos by Tom Sweeney

Garrison Keillor, center, at the World Theater in St. Paul: "The theater was never a showplace, just a good place to do shows."



The first phase of renovation includes repairing the theater's exterior.

Come September, Garrison Keillor to get better World

A \$1.5 million renovation of the World Theater in St. Paul was announced by its board chairman at a press conference Thursday. The theater has been the permanent home of Minnesota Public Radio's (MPR) "A Prairie Home Companion" since 1978.

"It has to be used by other groups," said Conley Brooks Jr., board chairman of the World Theater Corp., a subsidiary of MPR that bought the one-time vaudeville theater in 1981. "We've talked to every performing group in the Twin Cities and I can't think of one that hasn't expressed interest." He added that officials of the Minnesota World Trade Center, which will be built nearby, have expressed interest in using the theater for meetings and conventions.

The first phase of the renovation—plastering, painting and repairing the exterior tuck pointing—is expected to be completed this summer so "A Prairie Home Companion" can return there in September. Since late January, the radio show has been broadcasting chiefly from the Orpheum Theater in St. Paul.

Phase Two of the remodeling will address plumbing, electrical wiring, dressing rooms and the archaic stage rigging system. Those renovations are contingent upon the raising of funds. A benefit performance of "A Prairie Home Companion" in conjunction with its 10th anniversary will be staged July 6 at the Orpheum. After that, Brooks said, the World will turn to corporations, foundations and individuals for additional money.

The 960-seat World was built in 1910 as the Sam S. Shubert Theater for dance and musical performances. General Cinema converted it into a movie house in the 1950s, according to Garrison Keillor, host of "A Prairie Home Companion." His staff removed the theater's false ceiling three years ago and opened the dormant second balcony.

"We want to make it as close as possible to what it was when it was first built," said Brooks.

"The theater was never a showplace," added Keillor, "just a good place to do shows."