

Entertainment

COLOR

THE LINCOLN STAR
Thursday, July 5, 1984
PAGE 13




Host Garrison Keillor was recently declared a 'monument.'

The cast of 'Prairie Home Companion': Keillor (left), Greg Brown, Peter Ostroushko, Vern Sutton, Prudence Johnson, Kate Mackenzie.

They're havin' high, ol' time at Lake Wobegon

By Jeff Behr
of The Lincoln Star

It had been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, Minn., just as it is every week.

The biggest news involved Father Emil, the 74-year-old pastor of the Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility Church. On the first truly warm day of the summer, the pastor was discovered out tending to his onions in the garden behind the rectory, wearing his short-sleeved shirt for the first time this year.

"It comes as a big surprise to everybody every year to see him," said Garrison Keillor, the chronicler of events in Lake Wobegon. "I don't know why . . . Priests have arms, you know, like the rest of us."

The other major event took place out at the Arnie Tollerud farm, west of town. It seems that when Arnie went out at 5 a.m. on Wednesday to do the milking, he found his Holsteins in revolt. For no apparent reason, one of the cows, Marilyn, knocked him down near the back door of the barn, and the other animals joined in the attack. Arnie eventually escaped, bruised and be-

winded, and went into the house to calm down. He had a couple of cups of coffee.

"By that time, the Holsteins were mooing in pain out by the door," Keillor said. "If you've ever had a full bladder and had to wait an extra hour, you know the feeling. You're no longer very feisty in a situation like that."

Finally, Arnie went out and opened the door. The Holsteins paraded quickly into the barn, put their heads in their stanchions and begged for La milkers to be strapped on.

"He strapped them on, but before he flipped the switch, he got up on the steps and spoke to 'em," Keillor said. "He said, 'I'm gonna forget what happened this morning. You can forget it, too, but let me tell you this: If that ever happens again,' he said, 'I'm taking the first two-week vacation of my life. You thank about it.'"

FATHER EMIL and Arnie Tollerud are typical residents of Lake Wobegon, a mythical community that exists only in the minds of Keillor and the 3 million people who listen to "A Prairie Home Companion" every Saturday.

Keillor, the creator of the mythical commu-

nity, reports every week on the goings-on in Lake Wobegon, "the little town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve."

"A Prairie Home Companion," which is celebrating its 10th anniversary this weekend, is heard every Saturday at 9 p.m. on KUCV, Lincoln's fine-arts radio station. The program, produced in St. Paul by Minnesota Public Radio, has been distributed nationally by American Public Radio since 1980. It is carried by 235 public radio stations across the country.

The program features a wide variety of live music, including jazz and bluegrass. But it's the "News from Lake Wobegon" that is the show's centerpiece.

FANS OF the show delight in hearing Keillor, the show's host, talk about a town whose residents seem to live a life the rest of us can only dream about. It's doubtful the people of Lake Wobegon have ever heard of MX missiles, Shute Mousies or West Al Vankovic.

Lake Wobegon, as Keillor describes it, fits Norman Rockwell's conception of America. Compared to Garrison Keillor, Paul Harvey and Charles Kurall almost seem subversive.

KUCV has received an "overwhelming response" from listeners since the station started carrying the show last September, according to Eric Graham, KUCV's general manager.

"A Prairie Home Companion" is one of the three or four most popular programs on KUCV, which broadcasts at 90.9 megahertz, Graham said.

Lincoln residents with strong radios also are able to hear the program on Omaha station KIOS-FM (81.3 MHz), at 5 p.m. Saturday.

WHEN "A Prairie Home Companion" was first introduced to KUCV's audience, Graham said, many listeners, accustomed to the station's classical music format, were taken aback by the program's eclectic mix of music.

Some of them expressed their displeasure to Graham. But, he said, a large number of them changed their tune after giving the show a try.

"Many of those listeners have turned right around and become the show's most ardent fans and loyal supporters," he said.

The 6-foot-4 Keillor, who describes himself as

America's tallest radio comedian, is planning a special broadcast for this Saturday's show to mark the program's 10th anniversary.

"I don't want to use the word glitzy," Keillor said during a press conference conducted via satellite last month. "It's going to be a very shiny show, of a sort that we probably will never do again, but of the sort that I think you're supposed to do after you've been doing modest shows for 10 years."

"I think it will be the greatest radio show in the history of broadcasting in this or any country in certainly the western world."

KEILLOR'S WORK on the show has made him something of a folk hero.

Connoisseur magazine recently included him in a list of 111 people who are on their way to becoming "America's living monuments." The list included two other comedians, Richard Pryor and Woody Allen.

"Well, that's great company," Keillor said. "But to be named a monument makes me feel a little stiff in the back and a little heavy in the feet. And a little bit worried about pigeons."