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Lake Wobegon shocker

Sadness, disappointment greet Keillor announcement

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — This time around, the news from Lake Wobegon wasn't so quiet.

Garrison Keillor's Valentine's Day announcement that he will "resume the life of a shy person" by ending his radio show "A Prairie Home Companion" on June 13 triggered hundreds of calls to Minnesota Public Radio, which produces the program.

"One guy said he nearly drove off the road when he heard about it," said MPR switchboard operator Phil Hastings.

"A friend will be leaving," said Greg Waples, a New York City lawyer originally from Iowa. "For someone living in New York, it was an oasis of calm."

The 44-year-old Keillor, known to an estimated 4 million National Public Radio listeners each week for his depiction of life in the fictitious town of Lake Wobegon — "the town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve" — told his audience Saturday night it's time to close up shop after 13 years.

"It's a very simple and painful decision that we learn to make cheerfully," Keillor said. "I want to resume the life of a shy person. I want to be a writer again. I'm tired, and it is time to stop."

The news apparently hadn't reached the Chatterbox Cafe or Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery in Lake Wobegon.

"Well, it's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, my hometown," Keillor noted later in beginning his monologue in the same fashion as always.

"That's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all the women are

strong and all the men are good-looking and all the children are above average," he concluded.

Keillor, whose book "Lake Wobegon Days" was a national best-seller in 1985, was not available for comment after the show and could not be reached on Sunday. His telephone number is not listed and MPR officials would not provide it.

"As the pressures mounted, he could begin to see it would be increasingly difficult to continue to produce the show every Saturday," MPR President William Kling said in explaining Keillor's decision.

"When you have a best-selling novel and the kind of visibility he has received ... there get to be more and more demands on your time. People expect more of you. People ask more of you, and any kind of normal life gets to be very difficult."

Kling said MPR plans to air repeats of "A Prairie Home Companion" for the immediate future, while it works on developing a new radio variety show. Keillor would be welcome to return should he have a change of heart, he added.

The show, coupling the Keillor monologues with skits, music and "commercials" for imaginary products such as Powdermilk Biscuits, is broadcast live from the 920-seat World Theatre and distributed to more than 275 National Public Radio affiliates. It has the largest audience of any public radio program, Kling said.

The cable Disney Channel recently signed an agreement to broadcast the remaining 17 shows.

For fans of Keillor's revival of "the lost cause of live radio," as he



Garrison Keillor announces Saturday night that he will cease "A Prairie Home Companion" on June 13. Picture was taken from a videotape of the show.

put it in his "Lake Wobegon Days" preface, the show will be missed for numerous reasons.

"It's something you don't see anywhere else — the old-time storytelling," said Toni Case of Wausau, Wis., one of those who called MPR in the hopes of getting tickets.

"'Prairie Home Companion' is the single largest fund-raising vehicle we have," said Ken Davis, program director at WBEZ-FM in Chicago. "The big question now is

whether people who traditionally supported WBEZ will still support us without Garrison Keillor."

For the city of St. Paul, said Mayor George Latimer, losing the show means losing a key part of the city's identity.

"Cities do all kinds of strained and convoluted things to make themselves special to the world, and then a guy like Garrison Keillor comes along and does it all for you," he said.

Co-host of NPR news show hired to fill void

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The co-host of National Public Radio's evening news program "All Things Considered," Noah Adams, will try to fill Garrison Keillor's shoes and develop a new show to replace "A Prairie Home Companion," Minnesota Public Radio says.

"Just as there came a time for Garrison to stop weekly performances, there comes a time for Noah to stop the grind of daily news performances," said MPR president William Kling.

Kling made the announcement Sunday, one day after Keillor surprised his audience at the beginning of his weekly radio show by announcing he would leave the popular program June 13 to pursue a career as a writer and live in his wife's native Denmark.

"Noah is one of the best people in radio, commercial or noncommercial," said Kling. "We hired him specifically to come in with us and develop the new show."

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PLICATE Keillor's personality and added that it is uncertain if Adams will appear on stage at St. Paul's World Theater, the home of "Prairie Home."

Adams was host of the news show for 10 years. Like Keillor, who had a best-selling novel with "Lake Wobegon Days" in 1985, Adams is known for a strong interest in literature and folk music.

Kling said the new show will debut locally by July and nationally by October. He said he'd been talk-

ing to Adams for some time, but acknowledged that negotiations intensified when it became clear in early January that Keillor was serious about leaving.

Kling said that plans for a second nationally broadcast show have been discussed for three years and MPR has talked to a number of prominent creative people about the show. "When we're ready to announce their names, I think you will be quite surprised," he said.

Keillor's show is the most popu-

lar offering for American Public Radio, which distributes it to an audience of 3 million to 4 million nationally. Although the network has developed a variety of classical and news programs, none has achieved Keillor's recognition.

Kling also said Sunday that the World Theater is about \$200,000 short of raising enough money to pay the debt assumed during its recent renovation.

Keillor's influence was such that during the \$3.5 million project, an MPR lobbyist raised the possibility of the show's departure if the 76-year-old theater wasn't given a facelift. The state Legislature eventually gave \$200,000, the city of St. Paul made a \$250,000 low-interest loan, Cargill, Inc., pledged \$300,000 and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority sold bonds to provide financing.

But the loan from the city is structured so that payments are required only if the theater makes an operating profit or is sold.