



Keillor, host of the radio show, A Prairie Home Companion, says he is leaving the show.

Keillor to give up show

Last broadcast from Wobegon to air June 13

By Paula Froke
The Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Garrison Keillor, host of public radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," announced Saturday at the start of the weekly program that he will make his last broadcast June 13.

Keillor, 44, author of the best-selling "Lake Wobegon Days," said he wanted to return to writing full-time and live in his wife's native Denmark for a while.

In late 1985, Keillor married Ulla Skaerved, whom he had met years earlier when she was a foreign exchange student at his high school.

His announcement leaves the future of "A Prairie Home Companion" uncertain, said Christelle E. Langer, a spokeswoman for Minnesota Public Radio, which produces the show.

Keillor told his audience: "The decision to close is mine, a simple painful decision that is cheerfully made. It is simply time to go. I want to resume the life of a shy person and live with my affectionate family a more peaceful life, a life in which there are Saturdays."

The show will continue as scheduled through the summer with re-broadcasts. A contract to televise the program of music and storytelling on the Disney

Channel beginning March 7 through the end of the season also is unaffected, she said.

Minnesota Public Radio President William Kling said a new variety radio show is being planned to begin July 1. He said it would not duplicate Keillor's work, but would like "A Prairie Home Companion" be broadcast live from the 77-year-old World Theater in St. Paul.

Kling said he had a feeling since the first of the year that Keillor might be thinking about leaving the show.

"As the pressures mounted, he could begin to see it would be increasingly difficult to continue to produce the show every Saturday when you have a best-selling novel and the kind of visibility he has received from Time magazine and others," Kling said.

"There get to be more and more demands on your time. People expect more of you, and any kind of normal life gets to be very difficult."

Kling said Keillor was welcome to return to Minnesota Public Radio, but said such a possibility has not been discussed.

Keillor, whose show is distributed by American Public Radio to more than 270 U.S. public radio stations, was unavailable to speak with reporters after the show.

"A Prairie Home Companion" got its start in 1974, and Keillor has made an estimated 500 broadcasts since then, Langer said. In 1980, the program made its national broadcast debut and

now reaches 3 million to 4 million listeners each Saturday.

In explaining his reasons for leaving, Keillor told the audience, "I want to be a writer again. I'm tired, and it is time to stop. This business is so much fun. It's easy to hang around too long, which you know if you have ever stood up and made a speech.

"You're terrified at first. Then they seem to like you, and then they laugh out loud at what you said, and in that moment, you are ready to talk to these lovely people all night and tell them everything you know for sure ... And then, in a moment of silence, you hear the unmistakable sound of car keys jingling in the dark," he said.

"At that point," Langer said, "the audience laughed. It was touching."

The show regularly features an array of music, serials such as "The Old Radio Bunkhouse" and "Worst-Case Scenario" and a segment in which Keillor tells listeners "The News from Lake Wobegon," a mythical Minnesota community.

In the style of old-time radio, which the program parodies, there are also commercials for such enterprises as Bertha's Kitty Boutique, offering feline fare such as "litter-box rakes" and "grooming gloves."

Last year, Minnesota Public Radio said Keillor and award-winning director Sydney Pollack were talking about making a movie based on "Lake Wobegon Days."