

Thousands seek that last visit to Lake Wobegon

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — An average of 30 people are competing for each seat available for the remaining live broadcasts of Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show, which ends its run June 13.

"People are calling from out of town — like New Jersey, a lot of people from the South — and are ready to drop everything and come up here for the show. People are willing to change their vacation plans to see the show," said Marilyn Schultz, director of the 77-year-old World Theater, from which the show is broadcast nationally on Saturday nights by Minnesota Public Radio.

The show reaches about 4 million listeners through more than 275 public radio stations, the largest audience for any public radio program.

In the first week after Keillor announced Feb. 14 that he was quitting the show, 22,000 phone calls poured in, Schultz said.

She also denied rumors that cute poems dedicated to Keillor's mythical Lake Wobegon would help people land seats.

"No, no, no," she said. "It is a lottery."

Minnesota Public Radio members get top priority for tickets, but even their requests are randomly selected, said Schultz.

Ticket requests must be mailed.

Shows broadcast this month or in April are already sold out.

The 44-year-old Keillor, whose popularity soared after his 1985 book, "Lake Wobegon Days," became a national best-seller, said he was quitting to spend more time with his family and to live for a while in his wife's native Denmark.

Noah Adams, co-host of "All Things Considered," National Public Radio's 90-minute evening news program, will take over Keillor's time slot. Adams and Minnesota Public Radio officials say plans for the new program are uncertain.

Before Keillor announced that he was quitting the show, the World Theater, which seats 900, usually received 2,000 to 3,000 ticket requests for each show. The procedure to get tickets was the same then, Schultz said.

Now, people are just more desperate.

Schultz suggested that fans tape the program on the radio or watch when the cable television's Disney Channel begins broadcasting the remaining shows of "A Prairie Home Companion," starting Saturday.