

The World is now a stage for Fitzgerald

By Neal Justin / Staff Writer

There's a lot of work to be done this week before The World comes to an end.

The World Theater will be re-named after St. Paul native F. Scott Fitzgerald and while literary fans eagerly anticipate a weekend full of celebration, sign installers were changing the city skyline, erecting the 50-by-20-foot sign bearing the author's name.

Tony Bol, manager of community and cultural affairs for Minnesota Public Radio, which owns the building, peeked out his office window Monday as the workers put up the soft ivory-colored sign with red letters.

"It's really quite dramatic," he said. "Right now I can see the L and the D."

Other than the giant letters, the name change won't have much effect on the theater where, 80 years ago, Fitzgerald watched plays on Saturday afternoons (back then it was the Shubert Theater.)

"We're not changing our business strategy at all," Bol said. "We think it's a positive public relations move because Fitzgerald was a native of Minnesota. The World Theater was named for a movie chain, which is irrelevant."

The switch also is a way to please longtime Fitzgerald fan Garrison Keillor, who suggested

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Theater / Keillor suggested change, will read 'Gatsby'

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the change earlier this year and got the idea approved with little red tape. Keillor, who will host the 20th season of "Prairie Home Companion" from the theater, is heavily involved in this weekend's activities, including a marathon reading Friday night of "The Great Gatsby."

Celebrity guests — from comedian Dudley Riggs to retired Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Wahl — will read chapters from the 159-page novel from the theater

stage, starting at 6 p.m. and ending around midnight.

Keillor begins the free reading and author Patricia Hampl, who has worked with Keillor to organize this weekend's events, will read the last chapter.

"It's very lovely to be read to," Hampl said. "It's going to be beautifully produced. It won't just be people schlepping up and down the stairs."

"Gatsby" is the perfect choice, and

not only because it's so short, Hampl said.

"There's a feeling that some novels have a perfection to them, like 'The Scarlet Letter' or 'Madame Bovary,' and in that list of perfect novels, 'Gatsby' is on that list," Hampl said. "It's got an economy and gravity that makes it resonate to generation after generation of readers."

On Saturday, fans are invited to gather at 10:30 a.m. in Lookout Park (located at Ramsey St. and

Summit Av.) If you have any problem finding it, just follow your ears toward the bagpipe music.

The group will walk to the World Theater at 11 a.m. in an informal parade.

"It's not a parade where people are going to set up lawn chairs and watch," Bol said. "If you come to the parade, you are *in* the parade."

Outside the theater, St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman will say a few words and spectators will be invited to dip

into barrels of water from the Mississippi River and White Bear Lake and christen the building with a splash.

Hampl said renaming the building makes sense, since the novelist always wanted to make his mark in theater, even though his one Broadway attempt, "The Vegetable," was a flop.

"Theater was his first love," she said. "It's appropriate that his hometown would name a theater for him."