

TRAIL RIDE IS ON AT WOBEGON



TIMES PHOTOS BY KIMM ANDERSON

Noted storyteller and author Garrison Keillor (center) streaked along the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail between

Avon and Albany Wednesday as he led an entourage of bicyclists to a formal trail opening ceremony.

Opening crowd includes man who lent trail its name

Garrison Keillor helps inaugurate 27-mile stretch

By Kirsti Marohn
TIMES STAFF WRITER

ALBANY — Myrvin Secord of Melrose has bicycled more than 1,500 miles on the Lake Wobegon Trail since it was completed in early June, although the trail did not officially open until Wednesday.

Secord and his wife, Jan, were among hundreds of trail enthusiasts who turned out Wednesday in Albany for the opening ceremonies. Events were also held in Sauk Centre, Melrose, Freeport

Outdoors/Recreation

and Avon.

The Secords were hoping to catch a glimpse of author and radio personality Garrison Keillor, who bicycled from Avon to Albany as part of the ceremonies. Keillor has allowed use of the Lake Wobegon name for the trail.

The 27-mile paved trail follows a railroad line that once connected Avon and Sauk Centre. The \$1.5-million project was funded through a combination of federal and state grants and county money.

Also on hand to help celebrate



Bicyclists passed a mile marker sign Wednesday on the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail outside Albany.

were U.S. Reps. Collin Peterson and James Oberstar, who biked from the Stearns County Fairgrounds in Sauk Centre to Albany. Both congressmen were enthusiastic about the trail.

"I love biking," Oberstar told reporters in Albany. "I'm just so thrilled to see the fruits of our labor."

In Avon, strong winds didn't deter about 100 bicyclists from turning out to welcome Keillor

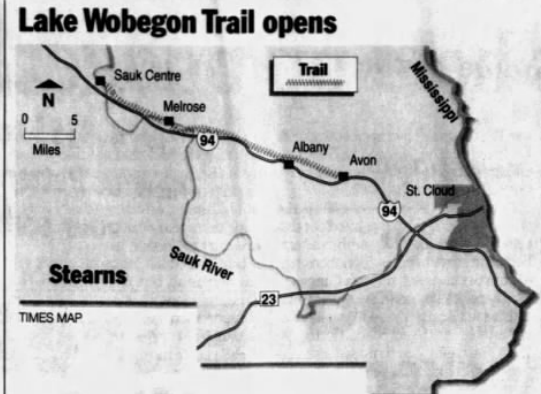
and making the trek to Albany with him.

Chuck Wocken, director of the Stearns County Parks Department, said that while he doesn't have any numbers of people expected to use the trail, it has already been busier than expected. Wocken credited part of the popularity to the trail's name.


"This is where the legend grew," Wocken said. Keillor's

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Lake Wobegon Trail opens



TIMES MAP



TIMES PHOTO BY KIMM ANDERSON

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Wobegon

popular "A Prairie Home Companion" radio program includes "News From Lake Wobegon," a fictitious Stearns County town.

The Secords recall Keillor from days when he rented a hobby farm in Freeport and often was seen sitting in Charlie's Cafe watching people and writing.

Jan Secord said she admires Keillor's humor, because "it's clean, but it makes you laugh."

Wocken said the name of the trail fits, because it is "more culture than nature."

"That's what this trail is about — the flavor of little towns," he said. Trail users also will get a glimpse of flour mills and churches that are listed on the Minnesota Historical Register.

Julie Abel of Edina, who owns a cabin near Albany, is excited about the trail opening because she often bikes with her children, Jemma, 10, and Trevor, 11. Abel said she enjoys the rural scenery on the trail, as well as the peace and quiet without traffic.

Eileen Ritter of Avon knows the dangers of biking in traffic. In June she was struck by a car while bicycling on a road. She injured a knee and cracked a vertebrae. Ritter was biking the Lake Wobegon Trail yesterday with her physical therapist, Roseanne Schoemehl of Richmond, and friend Vicki Statz of Holdingford. The three said they will make much use of the trail because they feel it is safer than biking on roads.

There were unusual bikes on the trail Wednesday too: Dale and Judy Haugejorden of Alexandria traveled to Albany just to bike the trail on their tandem bicycle.

Three more phases of the trail are planned. The second would connect Avon to St. Joseph and Albany to Holdingford; the third would connect Holdingford and Sauk Centre to the county line; and Phase IV would connect St. Joseph to Quarry Park in Waite Park.