

RINGWOOD



KYE-RYUNG LEE/Herald News

Garrison Keillor, host of the NPR radio show "A Prairie Home Companion," hobnobs during a reception for Paterson Habitat for Humanity fund-raiser Saturday.

## Radio celeb helps housing coffers

By ASJLYN LODER  
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### Habitat for Humanity the beneficiary

Garrison Keillor, the voice of National Public Radio's popular show "A Prairie Home Companion," donated his time Saturday night to be keynote speaker at the 20th annual fund-raiser for Paterson Habitat for Humanity.

About 450 people attended the \$175-a-plate dinner at the Skylands Manor House in the heart of the New Jersey Botanical Gardens. Keillor, dressed in a tuxedo and red Saucony sneakers, said during the cocktail hour that he had no recourse but to accept the invitation to speak.

"I'm here because friends asked me to come, and I don't have many friends, so I

can't say no to any of them," the author and radio personality said. "I've been the host of a radio show for 30 years. I have no social life."

Most of the guests were dressed regally in tuxedos and gowns. They began arriving shortly before 7 on the grounds of the historic Tudor-style manor house, lining up for valet parking.

The evening's festivities included an auction of items such as a catered cocktail party for 20, four Yankee tickets, four Mets tickets and a hot-air balloon ride for two.

Keillor, best known for his homespun tales of life in the mythical Minnesota

town of Lake Wobegon, auctioned off the right to name two characters in his next monologue about the town "where women are strong, the men are good looking and all the children are above average."

"Altogether, this event will pay for six houses — three in Paterson and three in Mexico," said Barbara Dunn, executive director of the Paterson Habitat. The charity aimed to raise more than \$300,000 Saturday night, with 10 percent going to build three houses for the Habitat chapter in Mexico.

Habitat for Humanity builds houses for families who earn between \$25,000 and 80

percent of their area's median income. The average family buying a Habitat house earns \$32,000 a year, Dunn said. Habitat gives those families, who must have good credit and be able to manage mortgage payments, an interest-free loan. In return, the family must invest 500 hours of "sweat equity" in building the house.

Paterson's Habit has built 160 homes in Paterson and expects to complete another in the coming weeks, Dunn said.

Later in the evening guests gathered at tables under a large, white heated tent, braving the autumnal chill as dinner was served.

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