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# Lake Wobegon con

## Keillor says Saturday's broadcast will include guest appearance by McGovern

BY MONICA LABELLE  
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Garrison Keillor drove past the Mitchell Corn Palace on a family car trip as a kid. The signs that advertised the "a-mazing" attraction fascinated him.

"To me, it suggested something inside was pretty fantastic," he said.

But his family didn't stop. "My dad was serious about driving and racking up mileage. He considered tourist attractions a waste of time."

This weekend, Keillor returns to Mitchell to perform his sold-out show inside the Corn Palace. "A Prairie Home Companion" will be broadcast live at 5 p.m.

### ON THE AIR

**WHAT:** "A Prairie Home Companion"

**WHEN:** 5 p.m. Saturday

**WHERE:** Corn Palace, Mitchell

**TICKETS:** Sold out

**BROADCAST:** SDPB Radio will air the show live and again at noon Sunday

Saturday on SDPB

Radio and will be rebroadcast at noon Sunday.

The radio show has been aired since 1974, with a hiatus from 1987 to 1993. It's best known as the birthplace of the writer Keillor's fictional settings such as Lake Wobegon, "where the women are strong, the men

are good-looking and all the children are above-average." Folk songs, stories of Midwestern life and spoof commercials are constants.

"A Prairie Home Companion's" base is St. Paul, but Keillor and crew make stops from coast to coast to capture the nuances of American towns, from Moorhead, Minn., to San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Keillor also is known for his liberal political leanings, as expressed in his books and to the media. But where he stands on issues isn't so much a factor in his performances, says Ruth Bylander, development manager with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

"Basically, his show is kind of homilies about the Midwest experience, and his political stances have been separate from his show in general. Like any entertainer, there will be people who are fans and people who are not."

She says about 3,100 tickets to the Corn

Palace were sold within a week. Nationally, the program has 4 million listeners.

The last time "A Prairie Home Companion" aired from South Dakota was in November 1999 in Rapid City. Bylander says Mitchell was selected this time because it's one of South Dakota's best-known performance venues.

Keillor and the show's researchers study the character of each town before they write.

"I like to get some idea of the lay of the land and what's what, so I have an idea of who I'm talking to," he says.

The audience can expect to hear George McGovern, who Keillor says might be cast as a saloon owner or rancher in a cowboy sketch. And a cast member could impersonate Tom Brokaw, Keillor says.

Whatever characteristics of South Dakota are played up will be affectionate, just the way he talks about other communities.

"We come with a sense of curiosity and a fondness for all kinds of American places," he says. "I think most travelers are positive-minded people, and that's why you travel."

The quirkiest characteristic of a place Keillor has come across was in northwest Iowa. The teens there, he says, would drive back and forth along the main drag for about an hour in a steady procession on Sunday nights. "It was interesting," he says. (Sound familiar, Sioux Falls loopers?)

"When I was in high school, as I recall, we used to hang out under the trees and sit and talk."

Times change, but Keillor's affection for a certain South Dakota author has not.

He reads the books of Laura Ingalls Wilder to his daughter, Maia, 7.

Though Wilder also lived in Wisconsin, Kansas and Minnesota, Keillor counts her as South Dakota's own.

"She really finds herself in South Dakota in the town of De Smet where the family settled, finally," he says.

"They were really the first books that I just wholeheartedly loved as a child."

And once Keillor steps inside the Corn Palace this weekend, he'll get to explore another South Dakota memory from his childhood.

Reach reporter Monica LaBelle at 977-3905.



### ONLINE

► For information about "A Prairie Home Companion," log on to [prairiehome.publicradio.org](http://prairiehome.publicradio.org)

► To check out the show's guest band, The Ditty Bops, log on to [www.thedittybops.com](http://www.thedittybops.com).

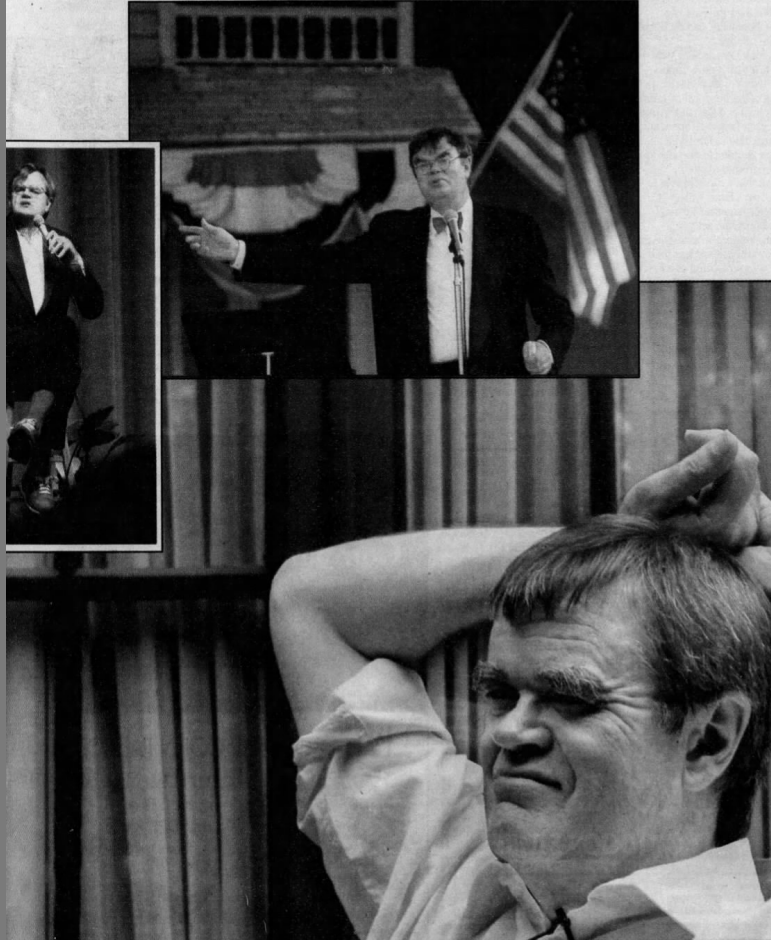
Garrison Keillor clockwise from left: July 2001 in Vienna, Va.; March 2004 in Charlottesville, Va.; July 1998 in Kansas City, Mo.; and August 2003 outside his St. Paul home.

AP FILE PHOTOS

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# nes to Mitchell



## How he does it

Here's what Garrison Keillor has to say about writing, as told to *Link* in a telephone interview.

### 'Flabby, tone-deaf'

**QUESTION:** You've said that just using a computer to compose a draft can make compositions "flabby and tone-deaf." Why is reading a draft on paper better than just reading it on a computer?

**ANSWER:** "I suppose it has something to do with the easy flow of it, but I can't exactly tell you why. It may be an idiosyncrasy of mine.

"When I've mentioned it to other writers, they agree with that. I see it in manuscripts that are sent to me by writers. "There's a sort of writing that one didn't used to see when people were writing on typewriters. It's very fluid. It's very facile, and it's very repetitive. Flabby would be my word for it."

### Cut to the chase

**QUESTION:** You've said you had no real talent as a writer as a boy. Something must have worked for you eventually, so how did the talent kick in?

**ANSWER:** "I think that every writer, young or old, published or unpublished, well-known or unknown, faces the same problem. Every time you sit down to do it, the blank screen, the blank page, is the same for everyone, and we struggle with it as best we can. There are advantages that come to you as you get older. You learn a certain focus, perhaps. You learn a discipline. You learn to push harder, to cut to the chase, to get to the point, to eliminate the walking back and forth in circles.

"Cutting to the chase is the big thing you learn with time. You hope to. The readers' interest just cannot be taken for granted, and you do not want to waste that person's time. As you get older, you become more and more leery of your time being wasted, and it starts to seem like a sin, really. In your 20s, you've got time to burn, and it just doesn't matter, and it does when you get to be older."