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Keillor taking stage at DakotaDome

BY JAY KIRSCHENMANN
jkirsch@argusleader.com

Fans of Garrison Keillor's storytelling can catch a live, free performance tonight in Vermillion, or at home.

Keillor's talk, "Why I Am Trying to Be More Truthful," is at the DakotaDome at the University of South Dakota and broadcast live 7-8:30 p.m. on SDPTV.

Bob Freiberg, a Beresford lawyer, has been a listener of Keillor's public radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," for years and plans to attend the show.

"I appreciate the way he pokes a little fun at us smaller-town Plains people," Freiberg said. "He mentions the potlucks, the Jell-O, calls us all Lutherans even though we're not, and the way he sees the inconsistencies of what we say compared to what we do. He is right about the idea that living in a small town, we all keep an eye on each other."

"His radio show is the most popular program on public radio and among the most popular of any radio show across the country," said Jack Marsh, executive director of the Freedom Forum's Al Neuharth Media Center at USD.

The foundation, which is sponsoring the show, is dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit, Marsh said.

In its 30th year of production, "A Prairie Home Companion" airs live on Saturdays with comedy sketches, music and Keillor's homespun humor

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Keillor

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about the fictional city of Lake Wobegon, Minn. A film version, set for release in early 2006, stars Kevin Kline, Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, Lindsay Lohan, Tommy Lee Jones and Keillor himself as a radio announcer.

"I've listened to the show for more than 25 years - he's a master storyteller," Marsh said. "Anyone across the country who lives in a smaller town can relate to all the situations he has talked about on his show."

The show is part of the ongoing Al Neuharth Legacy Series, named after founder Neuharth, a South Dakota native and 1950 USD graduate who is expected to attend tonight's performance.

To provide a more cozy atmosphere, the DakotaDome athletic stadium is set up with Keillor speaking from a stage on the turf. Half the stadium seats will be available, with chairs on half the field turf. That arrangement can hold about 7,000, with extra spill-over standing room.

South Dakota Public Broadcasting plans to rebroadcast the program at 1 p.m. Nov. 13.

Reach reporter Jay Kirschenmann at 331-2312.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Garrison Keillor, host and writer of public radio's "A Prairie Home Companion" and "The Writer's Almanac."

WHEN: 7-8:30 p.m. today
WHERE: The DakotaDome at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion

COST: Free, general seating
ON TV: Live on SDPTV; repeat broadcast at 1 p.m. Nov. 13

FOR INFORMATION: Call 677-5424

PRE-SHOW ENTERTAINMENT:

► 5:30-5:45 p.m. - Caribbean

Coyotes Steel Drums

► 5:45-6:02 p.m. - Chamber Singers

► 6:02-6:20 p.m. - Jazz Quintet

► 6:20-6:37 p.m. - Rawlins Trio

► 6:37-6:54 p.m. - Marching Band

► 7 p.m. - Aidan Soder singing the national anthem

Radio was early, long-lived pursuit for Minnesotan

Garrison Keillor, born in Anoka, Minn., in 1942, lives in St. Paul with his wife and daughter.

As a student at the University of Minnesota, he had his first on-air experience as a radio announcer at the campus station.

After graduating in 1966 with a bachelor's degree in English, Keillor returned to radio three years later, taking a job with Minnesota Public Radio on a classical music program called "A Prairie Home Morning Show." It was named for the Prairie Home cemetery in Moorhead, Minn., where he envisioned a radio show featuring musical guests and commercials for imaginary products.

In 1974, Keillor brought the vision to life, hosting the first live broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" at the Janet Wallace

Auditorium in St. Paul.

During the next 13 years, the program became a weekly fixture at St. Paul's Fitzgerald Theater, but Keillor ended it for a short time in 1987. Two years later, it returned to radio under a new name - "The American Radio Company" - at New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music.

The new show was carried by more than 200 stations during its four seasons on the air. In 1992, Keillor moved the program back to Minnesota. The following year, the show reverted to its original name, "A Prairie Home Companion."

Today, more than 550 public radio stations broadcast the show in the United States, and it is heard abroad on America One and the Armed Forces Network.

Jay Kirschenmann