

Garrison Keillor set to appear in Manchester

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MANCHESTER — Garrison Keillor might sing tonight at the Burr and Burton Academy. He might tell stories. Possibly, he'll read from the new book he's promoting, "Pontoon: A Novel of Lake Wobegon."

The people at the Northshire Bookstore in Manchester aren't quite sure what Keillor will do tonight except to know he'll be entertaining.

Keillor, a successful author, National Public Radio personality and, on at least one occasion, movie star, will be appearing in Manchester at the Burr and Burton gymnasium at 7 p.m.

Marie Leahy, marketing director for the Northshire, said Keillor's presentation will be up

to him and because he is such a talented entertainer, may go in any number of directions.

Keillor rose to fame as the host of "A Prairie Home Companion," which began in 1974, and continues today as a live radio variety show broadcast every Saturday.

The show has made Keillor's "hometown," the fictitious Lake Wobegon, as famous as an ideal of Americana as Bedford Falls from "It's a Wonderful Life" or Mayberry from "The Andy Griffith Show." Keillor regularly tells tales of Lake Wobegon on the radio show.

He also sings along with musical guests, presents jingles for fictitious baking products and extols

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the virtues of ketchup consumption.

With a repertoire like that, it's easy to see why the Northshire doesn't know what direction Keillor might take.

The bookstore hosted Keillor a few years ago at Manchester Elementary-Middle School, Leahy said, and it proved so popular they have moved to a bigger venue.

The gym at Burr and Burton holds about 800 people and Leahy said the bookstore's staff is expecting more than 600 at tonight's event.

The Prairie Home Companion Web site describes Keillor's latest book, "Pontoon," as typical of other Lake Wobegon tales which have a gently twisted humor.

"It is Lake Wobegon as you've imagined it — good loving people who drive each other slightly crazy,"

the site reads.

Keillor has written about a dozen books, many set in Lake Wobegon.

Tickets to Keillor's appearance include a copy of "Pontoon" and Leahy said he will be personalizing copies for the audience.

Keillor's appearance could be a special treat for Vermonters because it's his only scheduled trip to the state.

In fact, his tour calendar includes stops in places like New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Baltimore, Seattle, Boston and Denver. Manchester stands out as the least familiar store on the tour outside of Keillor's native Minnesota, and even one of those stops is in a Barnes and Noble.

However, the Northshire Bookstore has long had a reputation as an independent bookstore that can attract the biggest literary names. Past store appearances have been made by authors such as Mitch Albom, David Sedaris, Frank McCourt and Alan Alda.

"It's really a testament to our events team. They've been able to cultivate relationships with the publishers that allow us to attract some of the biggest authors," Leahy said.

Leahy said the staff at the bookstore was "over the moon" when Keillor confirmed his local appearance.

The Northshire will be having other big name guests this year including documentary filmmaker Ken Burns on Nov. 28 and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman on Dec. 1.

Leahy said there are still tickets available for Keillor's appearance tonight. They can be purchased from the Northshire's Web site or at the store, at the intersection of routes 11/30 and 7A in Manchester, until 4:30 p.m. or at the door at Burr and Burton.

For more information online, visit the Northshire's Web site at www.northshire.com.

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