

"A Prairie Home Companion" host Garrison Keillor performs at the Iowa State Fair in 2008. He will speak as part of the Martin Bucksbaum Distinguished Lecture series Tuesday at Drake University. MARY CHIND/REGISTER FILE PHOTO

Keillor: Familiar like an Iowa uncle

By MIKE KILEN mkilen@dmreg.com

Garrison Keillor could just as well be your Iowa uncle, so familiar are his cracker barrel philosophies. He wears a porchdog face, like you'd see over the mashed potatoes at Thanksgiving, and tells stories in a whispering timbre hinting at a deeper, more playful layer.

more playful layer. Appearing at Drake University's Knapp Center Tuesday as part of the Martin Bucksbaum Distinguished Lecture series, Keillor rode around the country roads of central Minnesota as a young writer, stopping in cafes just to listen to the conversations.

It served him well. His "A Prairie Home Companion," heard on Iowa Public Radio and 600 other radio stations by 4.3 million people, has been the beneficiary of his common-man's ear for nearly 28 years. But so have his novels on Lake Wobegon and his silky-smooth essays, such as one from 2007, "Why Iowa Matters."

He described his male role models, men in his family who talked of manly things, looking out across the fields, leaning against a 1947 Ford.

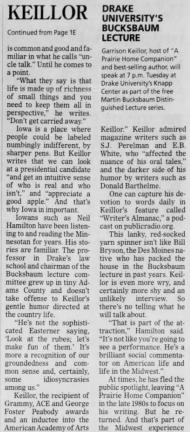
"So what's going on in your neck of the woods? ... Oh, not so much. Keeping busy. ... How's that car of yours running? ... Got us to Idaho and back. ... So how was that? Well, she burned a little oil but she was getting almost 20 miles to the gallon."

And so he writes of gas mileage bragging, an accepted lie from Christians, and the art of raising strawberries, and all that

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and an inductee into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Radio Hall of Fame, has authored a vast variety of books. This radio work and writ-ing, which started to ap-pear to wider audiences in The New Yorker in the J970s, have "cross-pollinat-ed," wrote Peter Scholl, the Luther College English professor who wrote the 1993 biography "Garrison

BUCKSBAUM LECTURE Garrison Keillor, host of "A Prairie Home Companion" and best-seiling author, will speak at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Drake University's Knapp Center as part of the free Martin Bucksbaum Distin-guished Lecture series.

lecture in past years. Keil-lor is even more wry, and certainly more shy and an unlikely interview. So there's no telling what he will talk about. "That is part of the st

there's no telling what he will talk about. "That is part of the at-traction," Hamilton said. "It's not like you're going to see a performance. He's a brilliant social commenta-tor on American life and life in the Midwest." At times, he has fled the public spotlight, leaving 'A Prairie Home Companion" in the late 1980s to focus on his writing. But he re-turned. And that's part of the Midwest experience lowans can understand. "There's some levels of humanity people connect to and that they can relate to their own," Hamilton said. "The craft is being able to crystallize an idea. Mark Twain and H.L Mark Twain and H.L Mark Twain and H.L Mark Twain and H.L signed to him.

Neil Hamilton, who helped arrange the lecture, says Keillor is a "brilliant social com-mentator on American life and life in the Midwest."

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