

# Fans weebegone as Keillor to leave 'Prairie Home Companion'

By PAULA FROKE  
The Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The leading citizen of Lake Wobegon will long be remembered, fans of "A Prairie Home Companion" said Sunday after learning that host Garrison Keillor will end the nationally broadcast radio show to "resume the life of a shy person."

"A friend will be leaving," said Greg Waples, a New York City attorney who joined hundreds of others calling to seek tickets for the show before it winds up its 13-year run on June 13. "For someone living in New York, it was an oasis of calm."

The 44-year-old Keillor, whose 1985 book "Lake Wobegon Days" became a national best-seller, began his Saturday night radio monologue by saying his show "will be closing up shop at the end of this season."

"It's a very simple and painful decision that we learn to make cheerfully," Keillor told his audience. "I want to resume the life of

a shy person. I want to be a writer again. I'm tired and it is time to stop."

The Anoka, Minn., native said he wants to spend more time with his family and live awhile in his wife's native country of Denmark.

He was not available for comment after the show and could not be reached on Sunday. His telephone number is unlisted and Minnesota Public Radio, which produces Keillor's show, would not give it out.

Keillor gained a nationwide following for his rambling monologues depicting the fictitious town of Lake Wobegon. "The town that time forgot and the decades cannot improve," along with music, skits

and "commercials" for imaginary products such as Powdermilk Biscuits, which "give shy persons the strength to get up and do what needs to be done."

The show is broadcast live from the 77-year-old World Theatre in St. Paul. It reaches some 4 million listeners through more than 275 public radio stations, the largest audience for any public radio program, according to MPR officials.

The cable Disney Channel recently signed an agreement to televise the remaining 17 shows of the season.

MPR President William Kling said the station plans to air repeats of "A Prairie Home Companion" while it develops a new radio variety show. Keillor would be welcome to return should he have a

change of heart, Kling said.

"As the pressures mounted, he could begin to see it would be increasingly difficult to continue to produce the show every Saturday," he said. "When you have a best-selling novel and the kind of visibility he has received... there get to be more and more demands on your time."

"People ask more of you, and any kind of normal life gets to be very difficult," he said.

The MPR switchboard, normally closed on Sundays, opened to receive hundreds of calls from fans wanting information or seeking tickets. "One guy said he nearly drove off the road when he heard about it," said switchboard operator Phil Hastings.

Across the country, American

Public Radio affiliates handled their share of calls from the Keillor faithful and worried about the effects of losing the program.

"Clearly it's the most popular program we have, no doubt about that. 'Prairie Home Companion' is the single largest fund-raising vehicle we have," said Ken Davis, program director at WBEZ-FM in Chicago. "The big question now is whether people who traditionally supported WBEZ will still support us without Garrison Keillor."



Keillor

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