



Staff Photo by Duane Braley

Minnesota Public Radio President Bill Kling watched a tape Saturday of Garrison Keillor announcing the end of "A Prairie Home Companion."

## Keillor to end 'Prairie Home' on June 13

By Rob Hotakainen and Randy Furst  
Staff Writers

The ads for Powdermilk Biscuits and Jack's Auto Repair are going off the air. Lake Wobegon will be gone.

Garrison Keillor announced on his

"A Prairie Home Companion" radio program Saturday evening that he is calling it quits.

Keillor, one of the nation's best-known humorists and one of Minnesota's most prominent citizens, surprised his audience at the World Theater in downtown St. Paul and fans around the world when he said

his last show will be June 13.

The announcement came after an advertisement for the famous biscuits as Keillor nonchalantly cleaned his glasses. He told his listeners he wanted "to resume the life of a shy person and live with my affectionate family a more peaceful life, a life in which there are Satur-

days."

"The show has had a good long run of 13 years in Minnesota and we're very grateful to all of you who made it seem worthwhile," Keillor said. "The decision to close is mine, a simple, painful decision that is

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## Keillor

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cheerfully made: It is simply time to go. We want to live for a while in my wife's country of Denmark. I want to be a writer again. I'm tired and it is time to stop."

Keillor met Ulla Skaerred, a native of Denmark, when she was an exchange student at Anoka High School in 1960. They became reacquainted at a 25th class reunion and were married in 1985.

The folksy Saturday program — which intermixed Keillor monologues, skits, songs and music — had a small but loyal following for years, but attracted an increasingly broad and enthusiastic audience after American Public Radio agreed to distribute the program nationally, beginning in 1980. The program continued to originate from the World Theater at Washburn and Exchange Sts.

Keillor, 44, now has an estimated weekly audience of 4 million and has the most popular radio program on American Public Radio, said Chris Langer, director of communications for Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), which produces the show.

Bill Kling, MPR president, said the show's "rich archives" will provide reruns that will continue to be heard on public radio. MPR has the right to rerelease any shows. MPR also will try to line up a new national variety show at the World Theater by July, Kling said, declining to reveal any details.

"The door is open here if (Keillor) decides he wants to do something with us again," Kling said, adding that the "Prairie Home" cancellation will not result in any layoffs.

Kling said the loss of the show should not affect MPR's fund-raising abilities. "We're reasonably confident that we'll be in good shape," he said.

Keillor, a native of Anoka who now lives in St. Paul, gained national prominence in 1985 with the publication of his book, "Lake Wobegon Days," which became a surprise best seller, remaining on the New York Times best-seller list for 44 weeks. The book fleshed out the fictional Minnesota town he talks about each week on the radio show. The book also helped put Keillor on Time magazine's cover in October 1985.

The radio show's first broadcast, in 1974, began with only 12 people in the audience at Janet Wallace Fine Arts Center at Macalester College. It was heard live on KSNJ-FM. It moved to the World Theater in 1978 and was first broadcast nationally over American Public Radio to 30 stations in 1980. It now is carried by more than 275 stations throughout the United States, Canada and Australia.

The success of the show was a major factor in the decision to close and refurbish the World Theater, which was accomplished with \$3.5 million in corporate and foundation money and additional help through local revenue bonds.

The theater was closed for two years, while the show originated from the Orpheum Theater in St. Paul and from other U.S. cities. The World Theater reopened in January of last year.

"It had to come (to an end) sometime," said St. Paul Mayor George Latimer. "I feel good about him, a little bit sad. I feel grateful and very happy to have him as part of the scene for the past 13 or 14 years. We saved the World (Theater) as result of Garrison Keillor. It would have been gone, it was history. That will be a permanent part of his legacy."

Keillor avoided reporters last night, but hinted in a 1984 interview that the end of his show might be nearing. "All shows have a short life," he said. "Nothing goes on forever, except the Beach Boys."

Keillor recently had signed a contract with the Disney television cable channel to telecast "A Prairie Home Companion." The first show under the contract was taped yesterday and will be broadcast on the channel March 7, Langer said. The Disney Channel contract is for 17 performances, the same number of shows

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Card.

is how big the plane will be. How we  
can only speculate."

## Keillor

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left before the final program June 13,  
Langer said.

Keillor's show won two Corporation  
for Public Broadcasting Awards as  
well as the prestigious Peabody  
Award.

Long before Keillor became a fixture  
on public radio, he was a well-known  
writer and his work has been pub-  
lished in the New Yorker magazine,  
Atlantic Monthly, Esquire, Sports Il-  
lustrated and the New York Times.

Kling called the Keillor show "one of  
MPR's proudest achievements," add-  
ing, "We'll never forget the journey  
and we're fortunate to have learned  
the roads well enough so that we can  
start out anew — perhaps in a new  
direction, but with the confident  
hope that we will travel with equal  
success."

Keillor had decided to make the an-  
nouncement two weeks ago, MPR  
officials said.

After last night's show, while a group  
of reporters gathered around his red  
four-wheel-drive Blazer parked by  
the loading dock of the theater, Keil-  
lor reportedly left through an exit in  
the front of the building and rode  
away in a station wagon.

Among those who have performed  
on the show, the loss of "A Prairie  
Home Companion" means more  
than just the end of two hours of  
entertainment on Saturday night,  
said John Coakley, a member of The  
Boys of the Lough, a tour band that's  
played for the show about a dozen  
times. Radio loses too, he said.

"It's bad news. It made live radio  
live," Coakley said after Saturday's  
show. "It's so rare, making live ra-  
dio."

Staff Writer Chris Ison contributed  
to this article.

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