

Keillor fans miss good old days

By DEBORAH HUDSON

Times Staff Writer

LAKE WOBEGON COUNTRY, U.S.A. — Goodbye, Lake Wobegon. Hello, Woe-to-come.

That's how some die-hard Garrison Keillor fans feel about Saturday's final broadcast of the immensely popular radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion."

More than 4 million people have listened weekly as Keillor told tales about his mythical hometown, Lake Wobegon. The show has been broadcast Saturdays over 275 American Public Radio Network stations from 5 to 7 p.m. Minnesota time. The Saturday show has been on the air since July 1974.

Central Minnesota has always held a special place in Keillor's heart. Locals insist his best-selling book, "Lake Wobegon Days," is based on observations made while living in Freeport and from visits to Albany.

But there are plenty of folks out there who

Find a permanent companion

The final "Prairie Home Companion" can be heard from 5 to 7 p.m. Saturday on KSJR-90.1 FM.

Cassettes of the broadcast will be available in July from Wireless, Minnesota Public Radio, Box 70870, St. Paul 55170. When ordering by phone, ask for cassette tape No. 21172. Cost is \$12.95 plus \$2.25 shipping and handling fee.

Video tapes (\$29.95) are also available. Call 1-800-328-6252 for ordering information.

can say they knew him when — when he was doing the morning show out of KSJR-Collegeville in the late 1960s and early 70s, when he broadcast shows from Little Falls and St. John's University and when he wasn't a national celebrity.

"We enjoyed him earlier on, when it was a more intimate thing," said Sue Durrant, 40,

a weaver and kindergarten teacher in Long Prairie. She and her husband, Paul Durrant, "discovered" Keillor on the radio when he was on the morning show with Jim Ed Poole, alias Tom Keith. After he left Collegeville, Keillor continued the morning show in St. Paul from July 1974 until October 1982. During those years, he did both "Prairie Home" and the morning show.

"Those were the old, old days," Durrant said. "You kind of felt like you were part of a small group and really on to something."

The Durrants were instrumental in helping Heartland Food Co-op in Little Falls sponsor Keillor's show at the Charles D. Martin Auditorium.

"The first time he came up, we had a hard time getting people to come," Durrant said, recalling an audience of about 400. Keillor was welcomed to Little Falls in true Central Minnesota style.

Keillor/2B



Gannett News Service photo

Garrison Keillor, who got his broadcasting start in Central Minnesota, says goodbye to millions of faithful listeners on "A Prairie Home Companion" Saturday.

toyland bonanzas. This is the same celebrated the birth of their first

Keillor

lled "We had a potluck supper before the any show, and he and the crew came. That ha- wouldn't happen now," Durrant said. She counts the time she played piano for a Christmas Eve show among her favorite Garrison Keillor memories.

Alexandria veterinarian Gene Karnis bemoans the demise of the show. He's spent many a Saturday night in a barn, delivering a calf, listening to Keillor's homespun monologues.

both "I used to try to hurry up and get done be a so I could listen," said Karnis, a large-animal vet for 33 years. "I'd go into the barn, there'd be a radio and I'd turn it to you Garrison. I suppose I've delivered food n of dozens of calves to his monologues."

t be Karnis says he's "rather demoralized" about Keillor's departure, but is had that comforted by his coveted collection of ave more than 400 tape recordings of am- broadcasts, some dating back to 1978.

able and Marlyce Sebasky said she was first called attracted to Keillor's morning show because of his gentle humor. She listened or so to him all the years as he went from a little-known announcer to a media star, whose picture has graced the cover of ve X- Time magazine, whose book became a nach best-seller in Decemer 1985.

solu- Now Sebasky, 38, is mad. your and "I just thought to myself, 'you can't do arly. this to me, you just can't,'" said Sebasky, a St. Joseph resident and florist g de- at Crossroads Shopping Center. Her cases next reaction was more like "go ahead food and go, see if I care," she said.

Sebasky is so angry, in fact, that she admits looking forward to the new variety show hosted by National Public Radio's Noah Adams, which will replace "Prairie Home" next year.

"I think we didn't realize we needed a change," said Sebasky, who has attended several broadcast performances. "Maybe this will be better and Garrison will be just a memory, a fond memory of someone you once liked a lot."

Despite his disappointment, Karnis said he supports Keillor's decision to give up the show and move to Denmark, his wife's native country, to resume a writing career. But the 60-year-old vet says he will honestly miss the monologues and news of Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery, Bertha's Kitty Boutique and the Side Track Tap.

An appropriate meal to serve Saturday night in tribute to the final show would probably include tuna hot dish and lime green Jello, he said.

But Karnis owes Garrison Keillor a debt of sorts, he said.

"I catch myself saying 'you betcha,' then I have to laugh," Karnis said. "I sure didn't used to say that."

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