

# Humorist aids homeless

**By Jeff Bradley**  
Staff Writer

**PATERSON** — Lake Wobegon came to Paterson Wednesday night when renowned humorist Garrison Keillor did what made him famous — told stories and sang songs — in a benefit performance for St. Paul's Shelter For Homeless Men on Broadway and East 18th Street.

After finishing a brief rehearsal earlier in the afternoon, Keillor, wearing his patented red socks, paused to speak of the homeless, an issue that has become

as important as several other issues to the self-described hometown liberal.

"Even if you rode in a limousine with smoked-glass windows, in and out of the city, you could not help but see them," said the best-selling author and creator of the mythical Minnesota town, Lake Wobegon. "You either have to pass by or you have to do something."

Keillor, who now lives in Manhattan, said that homelessness "is important to everybody," not just urban residents. He said a survey taken by one of the major television networks before the Nov. 8 election found "homelessness was one

of the top issues in the minds of people during the campaign. It wasn't talked about. But in the minds of people, it and the national debt were very much on people's minds."

"To those who live out here in the East in the large cities, it is the most public manifestation of poverty. The homeless in New York, New Jersey, Washington — all these places — are right out there in the open, and there's no way that we can ignore them."

"We simply can't. Nobody in New York City can ignore the people who are lying on grates, and who are lying in

subway stations," Keillor said. Keillor said he, like most people, give money to the homeless he sees.

Keillor performed along with Terrence Gaus-Woollen on piano and soprano Kathryn Armour. The Rev. Robert Mayor, rector of the Episcopal church at which the shelter is located, said Keillor's visit has generated tremendous excitement with phone lines at the church tied up all day.

Mayor said Keillor's appearance is a "morale booster to all the people making large and small contributions in all

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**REGIONAL**

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kinds of ways." He explained that it is an affirmation of the work done by 800 volunteers from parishes all across northern New Jersey who volunteer their time, serve supper, provide other volunteer services to the shelter.

Mayor said it is a "morale builder" for the volunteers to see someone with Keillor's national reputation giving of his time and talent. The rector said the volunteers may go and start a similar program in their own towns. Tickets for the performance cost \$15 and \$25 each with proceeds going toward support of the shelter.

Keillor said he has done another benefit for the homeless at an Holy Apostles Episcopal in New York City. He said that although he doesn't do many shows during the year, he estimates half of his shows are benefits.

Keillor said the benefit at St. Paul's will include hymn singing because "if the people who come are the people who I think will come, they like to sing and they would feel cheated if they didn't get a chance to sing out loud. The old Protestant hits are really the



Thomas Francis Herald & News

Soprano Kathryn Armour and humorist Garrison Keillor rehearse.

best songs there are for people to sing together in harmony."

Keillor said he does not plan his shows out in detail before a performance.

"I never plan these things out that much in advance. I will tell them (the audience) about Lake Wobegon, talk about growing up there and see if they feel like laughing. And if they feel like laughing, then I'll talk some more. Then if they don't laugh for awhile, I'll sing hymns or something — maybe they'll laugh at that. And if they don't like either of those, I'll offer a prayer . . ."

The author and radiog personality is not optimistic about the future of the homeless.

"I'm afraid the homeless people and the poor in general are 'out in the cold' for the next four years but they've had a long time to get used to it."

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin, the parish missionary in charge of the church's shelter, said he wrote to Keillor in July asking him if he would be willing to perform in a benefit for the shelter that has been operating for six years.

Mayor said the shelter, open from November through June, provides a light supper and a place to sleep for 25 men who are allowed to stay from four to six weeks. He said there are approximately 800 volunteers from all over the area who contribute to the operation of the shelter.

The shelter is operated jointly by the church and Eva's Kitchen, which feeds the homeless. The shelter also offers alcohol and drug counseling, medical check-ups, and housing and employment assistance.

Keillor, born and raised in Minnesota, is a regular contributor to the New Yorker and the author of three novels.

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