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93 ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

THE RECORD E-13

# 'Prairie Home' stories to benefit the homeless in Paterson

By Laurence Cheliet  
Record Staff Writer

Ask Garrison Keillor about his interest in the plight of the homeless and he'll quietly tell you about his children.

"I have three Danish stepchildren, and they have come from a country where poverty and misery are very rare. Denmark is a socialist country; you don't find this."

"My American son, the first time I brought him from Minnesota to New York he was 13 and could hardly bear to walk the streets," Keillor added. "He found unbearable the sight of the people slumped in doorways on cold days, or sitting with shopping carts filled with stuff, or wrapped up in blankets, sleeping in stairwells and on benches in subways, people with their feet wrapped in garbage bags... After awhile, he wanted to go home."

Those sights and that impact are some of the reasons Keillor has begun to do a few benefits on behalf of churches helping the homeless.

On Wednesday, he'll be at St. Paul's Church in Paterson, where he'll give a benefit performance for the St. Paul's Shelter for homeless men. The performance is at 7:30 p.m., with all proceeds going to supporting the shelter, which is in its sixth year.

Keillor is perhaps best known as the creator of "A Prairie Home Companion," which chronicled, first on public radio, then in short stories and books, the life and times of Lake Wobegon, an imaginary small town in Minnesota.

The radio show ended last year, after Keillor married Ulla Skerfved, a Dane, and moved to Denmark for three months. He now lives in New York City, where he continues to write his next book, "We're Still Married," which will be published in the spring. And he does what he can for the homeless.

In a recent phone interview from his New York City apart-

ment, Keillor talked about the problem of homelessness and his involvement with it.

"I don't think my commitment is more than anyone else's," he said. "But as a person living in a big city that is filled with homeless people, it is hard to avoid them. They are witness to misery and poverty."

"I admire the fact that the Episcopal Church takes them very seriously and is exercised about them, so I've done a couple of benefits," he added. "I enjoy getting up in

## LINK

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And that's the way it has been since Alex began doing auditions for commercials. Three or four times a week, Mrs. Losciolpo bundles Alex, Ashley, and 16-year-old Derek — a junior at Hackensack High School — into the car, and they bundle through the Lincoln Tunnel. Derek waits with the double-parked car, while Alex does his audition.

"That way, the audition only costs us \$3," says Mrs. Losciolpo. "Otherwise, it can cost you \$20 to park in midtown for 10 minutes."

Alex has been featured in Hardee's hamburger commercials. He's been an extra in "Crocodile Dundee II" and "Fatal Attraction." But "Child's Play" involved the biggest commitment of the family's time.

Alex, his mother, sister, and brother spent six weeks at the Hyatt Hotel in Chicago while the film makers shot exteriors, and then 10 weeks in an apartment in Los Angeles while Alex was on the set.

"He'd go and do his acting during the day, and then come home at night and fight with his brother and sister. The normalcy helped to keep him grounded," says Mrs. Losciolpo. That, she says, is her main priority — that Alex remain a normal little boy.

front of bunch of church people and making them laugh. It's not as rigorous as working in a shelter or soup kitchen, but we all have our limitations."

Keillor, 46, was born and raised in Anoka, Minn., a place that helped inspire Lake Wobegon, the town "that time forgot and the decades could not improve."

From 1974 to 1987, he mesmerized listeners with a blend of country music and tall tales on Wobegon and its characters: Dorothy at the Chatterbox Cafe, Father Emil,

the priest at Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility church, and a host of others.

For Keillor, New York City's homeless population was an eye-opener.

"Those of us coming in from the Midwest, where we don't have so many homeless, or we don't see so many because we get in our cars and drive from place to place — I guess we are particularly shocked, at first, to see so many here."

Keillor says that one reason the problem of homelessness contin-

ues to grow is that most people prefer not to recognize it; it makes them uncomfortable.

"We have a myth of a safety net that goes along with the idea of individualism, that if people do fall, there's net to catch us," Keillor said. "We want to believe this because each one of us believes that it is possible for us to fall..."

"We all want to believe that there's this system out there that will somehow grab onto us and hold us and keep us from plunging into outer darkness."

Since this is only his second show — his first was a benefit for the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen in Manhattan last spring — Keillor says that he has no set program. — "I stand up and talk and sing and recite poems, and tell about Lake Wobegon." He adds that he's looking forward to a night in Paterson.

He is an admirer of the poets William Carlos Williams and Louis and Allen Ginsberg, who wrote about Paterson. "It sounds like a special place," he said.

**LINK**

**"We don't take any hot cheese commercials. You know, Velveeta, grilled cheese, that sort of thing. Alex doesn't like hot cheese."**

*Dennis Losciolpo*

During filming, the children had tutors so they could keep up with their schooling.

A veteran of perhaps 100 kid-die auditions, Mrs. Losciolpo says she hasn't seen evidence of the legendary evil stage moms.

"The mothers of girls may primp them more in the waiting room," she says, "but if a child is crying and saying he doesn't want to do the audition, the mother will give him a kiss and take him out of there. I do this because I feel a responsibility to help Alex develop his natural creativity. It gives him lots of confidence, lots of poise, lots of ability to realize his creative potential as a young person."

"But, if you're not having fun, don't do it. And if your kid's not having fun, don't do it."

"Auditions don't scare me," says Alex. "I just don't like going on things I don't like."

"We don't take any hot cheese commercials," explains his mother. "You know, Velveeta, grilled cheese, that sort of thing. Alex doesn't like hot cheese."

## BRIDGE

By Alfred Sheinwald  
and Frank Stewart  
Syndicated Columnists

South dealer  
North-South vulnerable

**NORTH**  
♠ J 10 5 4  
♥ 9 8 3  
♦ A K  
♣ Q 8 4 2

**WEST**  
♠ 7 3  
♥ 6 5  
♦ 10 7 6 4 3  
♣ J 9 7 5

**EAST**  
♠ Q 9 8  
♥ A K Q J 10 9 8 4  
♦ Q 9 5  
♣ 10 3

**SOUTH**  
♠ A K 6 2  
♥ J 7 2  
♦ 10 8 2  
♣ A K 6

South West North East  
1NT Pass 2♣ 2♥  
2♠ Pass 4♠ All Pass

Opening lead — ♠ 6

4-2. Partner opens one diamond and you respond one spade. Partner raises to two spades. The opponents pass. What do you say?

**ANSWER:** Pass. Partner promises 13 to 15 points, with three or four spades. Since you have four trumps and plenty of losers in the unbid suits, the chance of going down at the three level outweighs the likelihood of bidding and making a game.

**DAILY QUESTION:** You hold S-10-5-4, H-9-8-3, D-A-K, C-Q-8-

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