

It sure hasn't been a quiet week around Clear Lake

Clear Lake, Ia. — It may have been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, as Garrison Keillor says it always is, but things sure have been popping around this north Iowa town of 8,183.

That's because at 5 p.m. today, Keillor leads a nationwide broadcast of his weekly "American Radio Company" show from Clear Lake's historic Surf Ballroom. The two-hour show is carried on 227 public radio stations and is said to have a loyal audience of 1.5 million listeners.

There have been some late additions to the show's lineup of entertainers, according to officials at KUNI radio in Cedar Falls, which is sponsoring Keillor's appearance here. A Twin Cities rockabilly band, Jack Knife & The Sharps, has been signed on, as has the 54-voice Waldorf College Choir from nearby Forest City.

"This all came together just in the last 10 days," said Ben Allaway, 33, choir director at Waldorf, a Lutheran-affiliated college.

"I'd written to Keillor back in October after I heard his show was coming to the Surf. I told him this is the choir's 75th anniversary year, and that our college sort of has some early ties to the Surf. Back in the days when dancing wasn't allowed for our students, some Waldorf professors would go to Clear Lake and cruise the parking lot of the Surf. If they saw any of

IOWA BOY



**Chuck
OFFENBURGER**

our Waldorf kids going into the ballroom, they'd go in and pull them right off the dance floor.

"I also told him that our choir has a unique heritage of being the 'second a capella college choir' in the nation," Allaway continued. "I suggested that Garrison Keillor wouldn't want the first a capella college choir in the nation, he'd want the second one. Actually, we do perform with accompaniment a lot now, but our heritage is a capella."

Allaway said his choir has had to quickly learn a Buddy Holly song, "Every Day," which they expect to do with Keil-

lor, and Allaway was asked to do a special arrangement "of a folk song about a Norwegian bachelor farmer who trades his cow for a fiddle then becomes all the rage with the ladies."

Keillor's radio monologues often feature tales about the Norwegian bachelor farmers and Lutherans living in and around Lake Wobegon, the mythical hometown he has created. You might wonder how much time he puts in writing those monologues. During a phone visit last Friday, I asked if he knew what his monologue here would be. "Oh no, haven't given it a thought yet," he said then, "but it's a whole week away, you know."

Also appearing on the show here are to be a five-voice a capella "doo-wop" group, 14 Karat Soul, from New York City, and Rob Fischer and the Coffee Club Orchestra, featuring veteran musicians from the Broadway stage.

Keillor's staff said earlier the show would feature skits about the Iowa political caucuses and some musical tributes to Buddy Holly and Meredith Willson.

Tuesday, the Keillor staff began doing some research on Iowa. Christie Brandau, acting state librarian in Des Moines, said "they called us with a whole bunch of questions. We had two researchers, Beth Henning and Nancy Haigh, who spent the better part of two days coming up with

answers for them."

Brandau said the Keillor staff wanted to know, among other things, "the number of hogs per capita in Iowa, how many Danes we have in Iowa, our population of Luxembourgers and what's in our soil that makes it so valuable." Henning said they were asked to find out how the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, which are given to school kids across the country, came to be developed in this state.

Keillor was expected to arrive in Clear Lake Friday and begin rehearsals.

His show here comes a week after the Surf had one of its biggest Buddy Holly tribute weekends ever. At least 2,500 packed the ballroom last Saturday night for an old time rock 'n' roll show featuring Bo Diddley and Bobby Vee. Friday night's sock hop, led by deejay Randy Chesterman, "had its largest crowd ever," Surf co-manager Sue Christensen said.

Today is also "Winterfest '92" in Clear Lake, with activities scheduled from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m. around McIntosh Woods State Park along the north shore of the lake, a couple of miles west of the Surf. The celebration is to wind up at dusk with a torchlight parade of snowmobilers on the foot-thick lake ice and a "Flashing Thunder" fireworks show, scheduled to start about the same time Keillor will be doing his monologue. *Boom!*