



JOE SCHOENMANN/THE CAPITAL TIMES

Garrison Keillor and accompanist Andy Stein perform for Lands' End employees.

## Keillor visit lures 1,000

By Joe Schoenmann

The Capital Times

DODGEVILLE — These hills aren't often host to much in the way of stage or theater. So Wednesday night villagers by the hundreds turned out for one of the year's entertainment highlights — 1½ hours with Garrison Keillor.

The 53-year-old author of at least six books, including "Lake Wobegon Days," and creator of "A Prairie Home Companion," his public radio show, treated more than 1,000 people to his reading of "Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain.

Midway through, the laughter was plentiful, though some children got squeamish and a day's worth of work drew yawns from some of their elders. But no one complained.

After all, the show was free. For the last four years, Keillor has given Lands' End employees the same such show in thanks for the company's generous support of his radio program.

In past shows, he sang with a local choir, gave a comic oration, and two years ago emceed a talent show that featured a dueling monologue with a yodeling Switzer.

After the show, Keillor — whose brother, Phil, lives in Madison — admitted that not only is he a big fan of Twain, but he has just finished reading an abridged version on cassette for Penguin Books, which has not yet been released.

Keillor began the tale with Huck Finn and the

escaped slave, Jim, rafting down the Mississippi River — Huck running from a drunken father and Jim seeking emancipation.

As soon as he'd finished, Keillor and his violinist, who accompanied the reading, picked up his notes and walked off stage. In a back room behind the auditorium, he gave an interview and tried to talk insightfully about what it all means.

"Money, really, is a side issue for me," he said when asked why he keeps doing his radio show and how he looked sort of tired and disheveled. "It really isn't a consideration. The important consideration is the work itself."

Due to economics, he said, his show tours mostly in larger cities. "It's rare play in a small town like this, which I regret," he added.

But his weekly radio show about the mythical small town Lake Wobegon and its residents has been hugely popular in cities and has kept him afloat for more than 20 years. It's currently heard on 165 radio stations nationwide.

He's not sure why it's so popular, whether it's because people have lost those small town memories and are reliving them through him, or if it's simply entertaining.

Neither does he try to incorporate today's societal ills into his material, or relate it to modern culture.

"That's not for me to think about," he said. "If I think about it, it would make me feel weird."