

Backward speech is quite a kcank — uh, knack



CHUCK LIDDY/Associated Press
Kelly Inch's life moves backward sometimes. She has a talent for speaking backward and was featured on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show.

Associated Press

DURHAM — You say "tomato," she says "otamot."

Kelly Inch — that's Yllek Heni in her language — has been called a linguistic freak: She speaks backward.

She doesn't just say, "Backwards talks she." She says, "Ehs sklat sdrawkcab."

Inch's special talent got a national audience last weekend, when she demonstrated her ability on Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" radio show, broadcast from Chapel Hill.

Stagehands stopped and stared. The person translating the show into sign language for the audience gave up and held his hands behind his back.

Afterward, she found herself being asked for her autograph and a television station and newspaper asking for interviews. The News & Observer of Raleigh reported. Colleagues in the cardiology department at Duke University Medical Center, where she works as a network administrator, are teasing Inch about her sudden fame.

Pam Henderson, a speech pathologist, describes Inch's unusual speech as a "higher linguistic ability." Inch calls it a talent, albeit an odd one.

"We all have our gifts from God; some get normal ones, some get abnormal," said Inch, 30.

Inch's earliest recollection of re-

versing letters dates to when she was about 7. She twisted the possessive form of her older brother Tim's name into smit and called him smithead.

She entertained her dad with one of her favorite words — refrigator, or rotaregirfer. Eventually, words grew into complete sentences.

Keillor's talent contest for people from small towns prompted the "Prairie Home Companion" fan to consider getting up on a stage.

"It's not like you can call a local talent scout and say, 'I talk backward,'" she said. "It's not like singing, where you can work weddings. No one's asked me to say their vows backward."

Inch, a native of rural Snyder County in Pennsylvania, mustered her courage, sang "Jingle Bells" backward to the radio program's answering machine. A producer called back and invited her.

Her short segment with Keillor, taped Saturday, was unrehearsed, although Inch told Keillor before the show that she could recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Keillor said that would be fine, and then maybe he'd tell a joke for her to translate.

"I said, 'OK,'" she said. "Do you have any idea what the joke will be?"

"He said, 'Something about a chicken walking into a bar.'"

Dna s'taht eht swen morf ekaL nogeboW.