

## BILL WUNDRAM

# The way to spread unfairness around

*Peoria, Saturday night: Garrison Keillor's finalists from towns under 2,000*

*"This show represents a sort of quota in hiring preferences, setting aside a show for people from small towns and discriminating against people from Minneapolis, New York, Los Angeles. Though they may be more talented and deserving, I say, 'tough.' We all know that life is terribly unfair, so why not spread the unfairness around more evenly."*

— Garrison Keillor

- 1 The metropolis of Peoria, Ill., may be as close to his old home town as Garrison Keillor gets in a long time, but Saturday is his big night.
- 2 Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" will broadcast the national finals of this year's "Talent From Towns Under 2,000" contest from the Peoria Civic Center.
- 3 Too bad that those in charge of the Adler in Davenport didn't snap up this unprecedented performance. Keillor once packed the Adler, a benefit for the Bettendorf library, inasmuch as he spent his toddling years as a resident of Bettendorf.
- 4 The contest will be a real hoot, says Tiffany Hanssen, marketing director for "A Prairie Home Companion." She's a graduate of Davenport West High and Augustana College, with oodles of relatives around the Quad-Cities.
- 5 Keillor must have reasoned that if the show plays in Peoria, it will play anywhere, but he need not worry. He has 2.6 million listeners on 460 public radio stations. (Locally, KSUI, 91.7 FM, Iowa City.)
- 6 This year's "Talent From Towns Under 2,000" was announced last January during a broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion." The six finalists — chosen from more than 750 entries received by mail and answering machine — will be flown to Peoria to perform on a live broadcast.
- 7 Each will perform one number during the first half of the two-hour broadcast. During intermission, the theater audience will vote by written ballot. This year, for the first time, the radio audience may cast votes online on the Prairie Home Page at prairiehome.org. The in-theater and online votes will be counted backstage while Keillor gives his weekly monologue, "The News From Lake Wobegon." The winner will be announced during the last half-hour of the broadcast.
- 8 The winner of the contest receives the coveted Silver Water Tower Trophy, a symbol of excellence in small-town America, and a check for \$1,000. Last year's winner, the Virtual Concert from Shelburne Falls, Mass. (pop 1,996), an eclectic acoustic trio, will return this year to present the Silver Water Tower Trophy to the new champion.
- 9 This Saturday's finalists:
- 10 **Uncle Henry's Favorites**, a string band from White Hall., Va. (pop. 50).
- 11 **Jill Jones and the Lone Star Chorale**, a western swing group from Driftwood, Texas (pop. 350).
- 12 **Bobby Arnell**, teen-age electric guitar soloist from Hardwick, Vt. (pop. 802).
- 13 **Jason Moody**, a 17-year-old award-winning classic violinist from Dover, Idaho (pop. 500).
- 14 **Nikki Matteson**, 16-year-old blues, rock singer and guitarist from Lakefield, Minn. (pop 1,679).
- 15 **Groveton Marimba Band**, a seven-member marimba band (most still in their teens) from Groveton, Texas (pop. 1,071).