

TINSELTOWN COMES TO MINNESOTA



Times photos by Jason Wachter, jwachter@stcloudtimes.com
Garrison Keillor (left to right) talks about his new movie "A Prairie Home Companion" with actors Tim Russell, Sue Scott and Meryl Streep during a news conference Wednesday at the St. Paul Hotel.

Keillor, stars flock to premiere of 'Prairie'

Lake Wobegon isn't in flick, but Streep, Kline, Lohan are

By Liz Kohman
lkohman@stcloudtimes.com

ST. PAUL — Hollywood stars descended Wednesday on downtown St. Paul to celebrate the Minnesota premiere of "A Prairie Home Companion."

The movie, based on Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" radio show, attracted a cast of celebrities including Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, Kevin Kline and Lindsay Lohan, and legendary director Robert Altman. The group can claim 27 Academy Award nominations and five Oscars among them.

The movie premiered at the Fitzgerald Theater, where it was filmed, and will open in theaters nationwide in June.

Cast members were escorted to the Fitzgerald in horse-drawn carriages, then walked down a red carpet and posed for photos.

A crowd of several hundred fans



Actress Lindsay Lohan talks Wednesday about filming "A Prairie Home Companion."

started gathering outside the theater several hours before the stars arrived.

See FILM, 5A ▶

ABOUT THE MOVIE

"A Prairie Home Companion" is a fictional movie loosely based on Garrison Keillor's weekly radio show by the same name.

In the movie, the show's future doesn't look promising after a large corporation buys the family-owned station that airs the show. Its stars are trying to get through one final performance before the show is canceled. Filled with great music and silly jokes, the film has deceptively dark undertones.

WHEN IT OPENS

"A Prairie Home Companion" will open in Central Minnesota on June 9. The movie was featured at several film festivals before its St. Paul premiere.

MORE ON PAGE 5A

Find out other stars who caught the St. Paul premiere.

AUTHOR'S OLD HAUNT IGNORES MOVIE HOOPLA

Times staff report

In between the Freeport State Bank and the U.S. Post Office on Main Street in Freeport stands Charlie's Cafe, the place where Garrison Keillor spent many of his early days scribbling about the comings and goings at his fictional Chatterbox Cafe.

While Keillor was preparing for a day in the bright lights of a movie premiere in St. Paul, there were no red carpets or starlets to be found in the heart of the region that inspired his most famous stories. Life went on as usual in Lake Wobegon.

9 a.m.

At Charlie's Cafe, Irene Obermiller boxes up a wedge of the cafe's famous sour cream-and-raisin pie. Birds chirp and semitrailers roar along Interstate Highway 94 as the pie buyer walks out.

"Drive safely now," Obermiller

Times photo by Frank Lee, flee@stcloudtimes.com

Charlie's Cafe in Freeport inspires Keillor's prose.



re-

minds him. It's something that any other waitress in another restaurant might say, but in this city of fewer than 500 residents, it's genuine.

Meanwhile, a man casually reads a communal copy of the St. Cloud Times at the counter, where news of the premiere of "A Prairie Home Companion" — a

movie based on Keillor's folksy humor — doesn't raise an eyebrow among the patrons.

"It's quiet here today ... real quiet," Obermiller says to no one in particular.

See TIMELINE, 5A ▶

'A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION' STARS IN ATTENDANCE



ROBERT
ALTMAN

GARRISON
KEILLOR

KEVIN
KLINE

LINDSAY
LOHAN

VIRGINIA
MADSEN

JOHN
C. REILLY

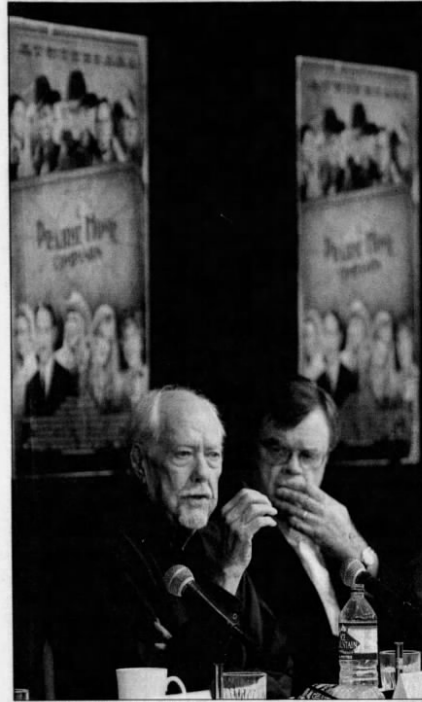
TIM
RUSSELL

SUE
SCOTT

MERYL
STREEP

LILY
TOMLIN

STARS NOT IN
ATTENDANCE:
■ WOODY
HARRELSON
■ TOMMY LEE
JONES
■ MAYA
RUDOLPH



Times photo by Jason Wachter, jwachter@stcloudtimes.com
Robert Altman (left) and Garrison Keillor talk about filming "A Prairie Home Companion" during a news conference Wednesday morning at the St. Paul Hotel.

From Page 1A Film

"We heard it on the news, and we kind of into celebrities," said Kim Marsalis, 47, of Maple Grove. Marsalis and her husband, Mike, set up lawn chairs about 4 p.m. near the red velvet rope.

Lohan mania

Armed with cameras, Lohan calendars and signs, the crowd screamed when the 19-year-old made her appearance, which marked the end of red carpet antics.

Photographers crowded around as Lohan tried to sign autographs while people of all ages pressed up against the velvet ropes trying to get the attention of anybody famous.

While the hoopla was more than a little out of the ordinary for downtown St. Paul, Keillor ducked questions about any feelings of pride he might have about

"Every day is a big day in downtown St. Paul."

Garrison Keillor
"Prairie Home Companion" is based on his real-life radio show

bringing the famous cast to St. Paul. "It's a big day for the horses," he joked during a morning news conference with Altman and the movie's cast.

As a reporter kept needling him about this "historic day" and Keillor questioned whether it was really historic, Lohan tried to help him.

"Just say yes," Lohan coached. "Every day is a big day in downtown St. Paul," Keillor said, refusing to give in to any coaxing.

About the movie

The movie tells a fictional story based on Keillor's real-life radio show of the same name. Keillor

plays GK, a character similar to his stage persona, and the rest of the cast plays performers and stage hands on the show.

Kline portrays Gay Noir; Woody Harrelson and John C. Reilly are cowboy singers; and Streep and Tomlin play singing sisters who grew up on stage.

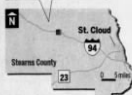
Several local musicians, including Jesslyn Stevie and Prudence Johnson, perform in the movie. Although the film is filled with memorable music and silly jokes, it deals with themes of death, aging and a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

And Lake Wobegon — the fictional Central Minnesota town and environs that populate Keillor's radio show — is conspicuously absent.

Keillor said he kept Lake Wobegon out of the script because he'd like to do a movie about it someday and he wanted to keep the projects separate.

"I have a couple of screenplays I'm working on," he said during an interview after the news conference.

FREEPORT



Times photo by Lisa Mueller, lmueller@stcloudtimes.com

From Page 1A

Timeline

9:07 a.m.

Obermiller brings coffee to Helen Midsendorf and Irene Free, regulars who sit in a booth, oblivious to the Hollywood-style hoopla that is scheduled to begin soon more than a hundred miles away in St. Paul.

"Garrison hasn't been around here — that I've seen — in the last, maybe, five years. But I have seen him," Obermiller said of the University of Minnesota graduate who lived a few miles south of Freeport.



Irene Free
A regular at Charlie's Cafe



Helen Midsendorf
Oblivious to hoopla in St. Paul

9:20 a.m.

Midsendorf and Free sip their coffee leisurely, about as interested in the stars of Keillor's movie — Kevin Kline, Lindsay Lohan and Meryl Streep, just to name a few — as they are in rushing out the door. In other words, not very.

"I don't like Garrison Keillor. I was raised in this area, and I thought he didn't know the area at all in the way he talked," Midsendorf said.

"He talks about a lot of stuff that we don't remember — that I don't think he remembers either," Free said with a laugh. "But I still like to listen to him on public radio," Obermiller said.

9:27 a.m.

Two well-groomed men enter Charlie's, conspicuous in their white dress shirts and ties. The pair ignores the framed, autographed picture in the corner, inscribed by the best-selling author: "To Charlie's, the true home of Lake Wobegon." It's

Where it all started...

The first and most familiar incarnation of "A Prairie Home Companion" is Garrison Keillor's weekly radio show.

It started as a morning show when Keillor went to work for Minnesota Public Radio in 1969. The show was named after the Prairie Home cemetery in Moorhead.

Keillor's work on a New Yorker article about the Grand Old Opry inspired the idea for a homespun radio variety show. On July 6, 1974, Keillor hosted the first live broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion" at Macalester College.



Times photo by Frank Lee, flee@stcloudtimes.com
The interior of Charlie's Cafe in Freeport, which inspired Keillor's prose. Inside, the shop's regulars were mostly oblivious to the Hollywood-style hoopla going on Wednesday in St. Paul.

one of the few obvious clues to the cafe's claim to fame. For 63 years, Free has lived in Freeport, about 30 miles west of St. Cloud. She and Midsendorf have been having coffee at Charlie's Cafe every morning for 30 years.

Midsendorf moved to Freeport in 1936 after she got married. She heard on the radio about Keillor's movie premiering in St. Paul. "Is that today?" Free asked. "I could care less," Midsendorf said matter-of-factly, before returning to her coffee.

10:11 a.m.

Oblivious to the disinterest in Freeport, Keillor, Robert Altman and other cast members gather at the St. Paul Hotel for a news conference about the movie. The group arrives on stage a little late because they were busy catching up with each other.

11:15 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Keillor, Altman and cast members float through a bank of hotel rooms, giving interviews to reporters for newspapers, television and radio. Lindsay Lohan, however, is relieved of interview duties and reportedly decides to spend her afternoon at the Mall of America.

6 p.m.

As the movie stars hop into horse-drawn carriages and are carted along downtown St. Paul's Wabasha Street to the Fitzgerald Theater accompanied by a marching band, a man stands outside Azalea's Pioneer Inn, adjacent to Charlie's Cafe, on the busiest street in Freeport.

Cell phone in hand, he is alone as he talks and paces, apparently unconcerned about the overhead skies above him or the red carpet arrivals in St. Paul.



AP photo
Actors John C. Reilly (left) and Virginia Madsen ride in a horse-drawn carriage from the St. Paul Hotel to the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul. The movie was filmed in St. Paul last summer.

AP photo
Actors John C. Reilly (left) and Virginia Madsen ride in a horse-drawn carriage from the St. Paul Hotel to the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul. The movie was filmed in St. Paul last summer.

AP photo
Actors John C. Reilly (left) and Virginia Madsen ride in a horse-drawn carriage from the St. Paul Hotel to the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul. The movie was filmed in St. Paul last summer.

AP photo
Actors John C. Reilly (left) and Virginia Madsen ride in a horse-drawn carriage from the St. Paul Hotel to the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul. The movie was filmed in St. Paul last summer.

AP photo
Actors John C. Reilly (left) and Virginia Madsen ride in a horse-drawn carriage from the St. Paul Hotel to the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul. The movie was filmed in St. Paul last summer.

Paid Advertisement
Herniated Disc?
St. Cloud, MN A new free report has recently been released that reveals how space travel has led to an amazing medical breakthrough. Discover how research has shown non-surgical spinal decompression is successful in treating debilitating back pain. Find out how this accidental discovery by NASA has led to the most promising back pain treatment today. For your free report entitled, "How Space Age Technology Is Solving Back Pain Without Drugs Or Surgery" call 800-897-4991 and listen to the toll-free 24 Hr. recorded message for all the details. Call now! Jason Lamb D.C. www.stcloudbackpain.com