

MPR lays out case vs. Keillor

Ties severed over “dozens of sexually inappropriate incidents” with woman.

By JEFFREY MEITRODT
and NEAL JUSTIN
Star Tribune staff writers

Minnesota Public Radio broke its silence on Garrison Keillor Tuesday, saying it severed ties with the host of “A Prairie Home Companion” after a woman who worked for the show told MPR he subjected her to “dozens of sexually inappropriate incidents ... over a period

of years” including “unwanted sexual touching.”

Keillor, 75, had told the Star Tribune Nov. 29 that MPR severed its ties with him after a single incident in which he placed his hand on a woman’s bare back.

But MPR President Jon McTaggart called Keillor’s story “misinformation,” explaining in a public statement Tuesday that the woman’s attorney detailed a number of alleged incidents in a

12-page letter to MPR. Dated Oct. 22, the letter included “excerpts of e-mails and written messages, requests for sexual contact and explicit descriptions of sexual communications and touching.”

MPR is not identifying the woman. The Star Tribune has confirmed that she was a long-time writer for the show who worked closely with Keillor, and that she is one of several women who claim to have received inap-

propriate messages from him.

According to a close family friend of the woman, Keillor’s behavior was “disgusting” and involved “vulgar” sexual language. When she rejected Keillor’s unwanted advances, the friend said, the messages turned “threatening.”

“He is not the nice guy that all of his fans think he is,” said the man.

See **KEILLOR** on A5 ▶



Garrison Keillor accused MPR of a “breach of good faith” in releasing complaint details.

Online: Read Keillor’s, MPR’s statements, startribune.com

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2018

★ ★ STAR TRIBUNE • A5

MPR lays out case for cutting off Keillor

• **KEILLOR** from A1

Keillor, in an e-mail to the Star Tribune Tuesday night, criticized MPR for a "breach of good faith" by releasing details of the complaint while negotiating a settlement agreement with him.

"How to respond to so many untruths in a short space?" he wrote. "The woman who complained was a friend, had been hired as a freelance researcher, an employee of mine, not MPR's, working a job that she did from home by e-mail. I hardly ever saw her in the office.

"Our friendship continued in frequent e-mails about our kids and travel and family things that continued to my last show and beyond. She signed her e-mails 'I love you' and she asked if her daughter could be hired to work here, and so forth. She attended the last show in L.A. She still features 'A Prairie Home Companion' prominently on her Facebook page....

"If I am guilty of harassment, then every employee who stole a pencil is guilty of embezzlement. I'm an honest fiction writer and I will tell this story in a novel."

Unashed check for \$16,000

Another longtime writer for the show said she wound up having a yearlong affair with Keillor in 2007 and 2008 after exchanging e-mails with sexual overtones.

The writer said she received a \$16,000 check from Keillor's company, Prairie Home Productions, to keep quiet about the affair, but never cashed it because she didn't want to agree to a nondisclosure agreement.

"By that time, I had already talked to some friends about what had happened," said the woman, who agreed to speak to the Star Tribune about the relationship only if it agreed to withhold her name. "I wondered: Could I be sued for that? I thought \$16,000 was a very small price to pay for me being wide open to lawsuits for the rest of my life, so I said 'No, thank you.'"

Her account was corroborated by another employee of the show.

Another former staffer said she received an e-mail from



President Jon McTaggart broke MPR's silence on Garrison Keillor.

Keillor a year or two after she stopped working for the show in which he married boss suggested it was a good night for a romantic stroll and sharing a kiss.

"It did feel a bit like fishing to me," said the staff member. She said Keillor didn't pursue her when she ignored the suggestion, and he never touched her inappropriately.

Neither of those women, however, were interviewed by MPR or its attorneys.

In an interview Tuesday, MPR's president said the company was unaware that other women had accused Keillor of sexual misconduct.

McTaggart said MPR conducted its own internal review, then hired an outside law firm to conduct an independent investigation. He declined to identify the firm. He said the firm was hired by MPR's outside counsel, Karen G. Schanfield of Fredrikson & Byron.

"We were not conducting the investigation, we were not setting its scope and we are not responsible for it," McTaggart said.

Schanfield could not be reached for comment.

'They liked their jobs'

Altogether, the Star Tribune identified 10 women who have worked with Keillor in recent years but were not interviewed by MPR or its attorneys during the company's investigation of Keillor's conduct.

"Why aren't they talking to the people who have worked with (Garrison) for so many years?" said Sue Scott, an actress on "Prairie Home" for 24 years. "What kind of investigation is this? I think this has been handled horribly."

Keillor created Prairie Home Companion, which debuted on Minnesota Public Radio in 1974. At its peak it was heard on almost 700 public radio stations nationwide, and reached an audience of about 4 million. Keillor retired in 2016 but continued performing.

MPR, which said it has

133,000 members, said 153 canceled their memberships in the week after it cut ties with Keillor.

Some female staffers accused the company of waiting to investigate until after Keillor's retirement.

"I think they liked their jobs," said Marguerite Harvey, who spent almost 30 years working on the show. "Garrison made Minnesota Public Radio, 'Prairie Home Companion' brought in money, which allowed them to do programming they wouldn't have been able to do."

MPR officials praised "Prairie Home" as a fundraising magnet, helping public radio stations raise millions of dollars in pledges.

McTaggart said MPR was not aware of any complaints against Keillor until August 2017, when a former MPR employee brought his concerns about a female co-worker to the company. The male employee did not identify the co-worker, so MPR launched an internal investigation, McTaggart said.

Two months later, he said, the company was contacted by an attorney representing the woman, who provided MPR officials with a detailed account of Keillor's alleged misconduct. In his written statement, McTaggart said MPR gave Keillor every opportunity to respond to allegations and provide evidence in his defense.

"Beginning in November 2017, the investigator reviewed documents and interviewed employees of Garrison's companies, MPR employees, and others for information about the allegations. Most importantly, before we made the decision to end our relationship with Garrison's companies, Garrison was asked for his response to the specific allegations, including alleged sexual contact and communications, and he responded to the allegations while accompanied by his attorney."

McTaggart said MPR, which had been widely criticized for withholding details of the allegations that caused the company to sever its ties to Keillor, elected to share more information this week because other media companies — including the Star Tribune — were on the verge of publishing their own accounts of Keillor's behavior.

"The recent renewed attention from media and the recognition that there were going to be significant press reports from a number of respected media organizations really required that our members and the broader public understand more about our process and the care we had in making our decisions," McTaggart said in an interview Tuesday. "And that is why we decided to publish my letter today."

What constitutes consent?

The writer who said she had an affair with Keillor was flattered when she first got an e-mail from him that included references to sex. She admired her boss and loved his writing, and she was astonished by the amount of care he put into a simple e-mail.

"Everything he writes is a beautiful piece of writing," said the former MPR employee. "There is talent pouring out of him."

She thought the references to sex were intended to pique her interest, to see if she would be interested in having an affair with a man twice her age. She was. She said the relationship was consensual, but she also felt pressure to say yes.

"I made some very bad decisions, but he is not blameless," she said. "The question is: What constitutes a consensual relationship between a boss and his underlings?"

McTaggart said he was unaware of the woman's allegations, but said her description of the relationship is troubling. "That would be inappropriate. We will not tolerate harassment or a misuse of power in any form. That is clear in our policy."

The woman said she did not complain because she thought it would not be taken seriously by Kate Gustafson, longtime managing director of "Prairie Home."

In an interview, Gustafson declined to say whether any employees complained about Keillor's conduct. But she laughed at the idea of him as a predator. "He created this wonderful world where everybody got a chance to shine," she said.

Jeff Meitroff • 612-673-4132
Neal Austin • 612-673-7431

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MPR LETTER

On the allegations against Keillor: "The woman who made the allegations worked for Garrison on 'A Prairie Home Companion,' which was produced by Garrison's media companies. In the allegations she provided to MPR, she did not allege that Garrison touched her back, but did claim that he engaged in other unwanted sexual touching."

On launching investigations: "We did not know of these allegations until late August 2017 when a former MPR employee brought them to our attention in a general way... MPR promptly launched an internal investigation based on the former employee's comments, although [Keillor] refused to provide the identity of anyone involved or the date or nature of any improper behavior. While we were conducting the internal investigation, in mid-September, we were contacted by an attorney who informed us that her law firm represented the former employee and also the woman who has since made the allegations. MPR repeatedly asked the attorney for the specific allegations regarding Garrison's conduct and eventually received them from her in letters dated September 29 (regarding the former employee) and October 22, 2017 (regarding the woman). The MPR Board was notified of the allegations on October 26, 2017. The independent investigation began a few days later."

On due process: "When MPR received the detailed letter of allegations in late October, I promptly informed the MPR Board Chair. We decided to appoint a special Trustee committee of four widely respected MPR Board leaders to oversee the process and advise me on decisions. I communicated with members of the special Trustee committee frequently, and we met regularly as the situation unfolded. To ensure impartiality, the outside law firm advising MPR engaged a separate and independent law firm to perform the fact-finding investigation. MPR provided the independent investigator with all requested access to MPR documents, emails, text messages and other materials to assist in the search for facts and the investigator informed the special Trustee committee of the facts she uncovered."

Self-defense from MPR President Jon McTaggart: "I discussed our request for a careful transition with Garrison, personally, on the phone the evening of November 28. The next morning, Garrison emailed the media claiming he was 'fired' by MPR. Since then, Garrison has posted statements to social media and provided information to reporters that have not been fully accurate and have suggested that MPR did not handle these matters thoughtfully. The irony is that while MPR has been careful to protect Garrison's privacy and not hurry any decisions, others have rushed to judge and criticize MPR's actions without knowing the facts."

On mediation with Keillor: "In addition, MPR entered into mediation discussions earlier this month in good faith to try and reach agreements with Garrison and the other parties involved in this matter. Unfortunately, the mediation sessions have not produced the final settlements we had hoped for. MPR was restrained in telling our story until we had the benefit of the facts from the outside investigation and had participated in the mediation process. Now that there is renewed media interest in this story, we want to inform our Members and the broader public of the important facts and information that compelled us to take the actions we did."

Online: Read McTaggart's full letter at strib.mn/2DFOZj8.