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American radio humorist has a top-selling novel

An American radio humorist, whose "A Prairie Home Companion" airs locally on north valley public radio KCHO, is also a noted writer with a novel on the New York Times best-seller lists.

Garrison Keillor, who every week takes public radio audiences from across the nation to his fictional town of Lake Wobegon, created the successful show 11 years ago.

Originally a writer by profession, Keillor took his radio program a step further when he wrote a novel about the fictional town in "Lake Wobegon Days."

Each week Keillor mixes folk, jazz, gospel and bluegrass music with his "News from Lake Wobegon" to keep listeners up on the happenings of their favorite characters.

He created "A Prairie Home Companion" with commercials during the program coming from sponsors from the fictional town of Lake Wobegon.

Five years after the show began, he told tales of those who lived in the fictional town and has been attracting large audiences, estimated at more than two million nationwide.

One of the bogus sponsors of the program is Powdermilk Biscuits, which are sold at Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery. Powdermilk biscuits is said to give shy people — like Keillor — strength to get up and do what needs to be done.

From Lake Wobegon's mayor Clint Bunsen to Father Emil, the traditionalist pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibil-

"A Prairie Home Companion" airs at 3 p.m. Saturdays on KCHO, 91FM.

ity, Keillor spins tales — at times humorously and at times sad — to entertain but not to sermonize.

"Some of the characters have a life of their own," Keillor says. "When I sit down and meditate about them, it occurs to me they're busy off doing things even when I don't talk about them. And it's my problem not to invent things for them, but to find out what they've been doing."

He started "A Prairie Home Companion" as a music and variety show, but later added ad-lib monologues about the make-believe Minnesota village.

"My idea was to give the radio audience the same sort of feeling I had when musicians came over to my house and we just sat around and played," he notes. "It was sort of a naive idea, but it was my feeling."

Week after week the storyteller, compared to Mark Twain by some critics, unfolds the latest from Lake Wobegon without the slightest hint of ever running out of ideas.

"I'm startled that it has been 11 years now that I have bene plowing the field, and it appears that I will keep going at it for a while," he says.

The original idea for "A Prairie Home Companion," he says, came from the



Garrison Keillor

Grand Ole Opcy and he credits his uncle Lew for his storytelling abilities. Keillor used to sit and listen to the fascinating stories of his uncle when he was little boy in a similar town to Lake Wobegon.

When asked if he thought that Lake Wobegon would ever make it to television, he said it was a scary thought.

What he wants most is to be recognized as a writer. "Twenty years from now I'll be 63, and when I'm 63 I hope to be in good shape and leading a dignified life of a man of the letters." ■