

Keillor spins tales on stop in St. Cloud

By Liz Kohman
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Lake Wobegon, the fictional town brought to life in Garrison Keillor's radio show and books, will be close to home Saturday.

The small town in the heart of Central Minnesota will come to life during the live broadcast of Keillor's radio program, "A Prairie Home Companion," in Halenbeck Hall at St. Cloud State University. Saturday's show includes a performance by singer/songwriter Tom Paxton, Swedish jazz band Kustbandet and other musicians.



Garrison Keillor
Will stop at SCSU

Arts calendar

Page 4C jazz band Kustbandet and other musicians.

The St. Cloud program is the third in a three-city tour of Minnesota. In recent weeks, the show has been broadcast from Bemidji and St. Peter.

"It was important to us and to Garrison to make the show available to people throughout the state of Minnesota," said Amanda Stanton-Geddes, marketing director of "A Prairie Home Companion."

Keillor wasn't available for comment because he only gives e-mail interviews, which is against St. Cloud Times' policy.

Keillor began working for Minnesota Public Radio in 1969 after writing a story about the Grand Old Opry in Nashville for the New Yorker magazine. In 1987, he left the show but revived it two years later in New York. In 1993, the show returned to Minnesota.

The show includes musical performances, humorous sketches and stories from Lake Wobegon. Keillor does not let the rule of "Minnesota nice" dictate his work. When it comes to the political commentary on his show or his articles on Salon.com, Keillor

See KELLOR, 5C ▶

If you go ...

When: 4:45 p.m. Saturday.
Where: Halenbeck Hall.
Tickets: \$25 to \$30. Minnesota Public Radio members get a \$2 discount. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster online at www.ticketmaster.com or by calling 253-3131.

If you listen ...

When: 5 p.m. Saturday, or noon Sunday (on 88.9 FM only).
Station: 90.1 KJSR-FM or 88.9 KNSR-FM.
Online: www.prairiehome.org.

Sunday, April 20, 2003

Life

From Page 1C
Keillor

has skewered the Bush administration, the United States' involvement in foreign affairs and Sen. Norm Coleman. Keillor's humorous take on the shenanigans of former-Gov. Jesse Ventura kept audiences cringing and laughing during "The Body's" tenure.

Hometown appeal

At Saturday's show, audience members will see what radio listeners can only hear, such as how the show's sound effects are made.

Tom Keith has been clucking like a chicken, meowing like a cat and cawing like a sea gull on the show for 20 years. He didn't always know he had a knack for making the sound of car wheels spinning in the snow with his voice, but it's a job he fell into when he was an engineer on Keillor's morning show in the 1970s. Keith also is co-host of Minnesota Public Radio's Morning Show as "Jim Ed Poole."

He makes the tire sound by whistling and humming at the same time. The sound was discovered like many others on the show — the need for a noise in a particular skit inspired Keith to develop it.

Not all sound effects on "A Prairie Home Companion" are made with Keith's voice. He sometimes uses props. He doesn't often use computer-generated or prerecorded sounds because their timing can't be as easily controlled. Plus, live sounds are visually stimulating

for audiences, he said.

"It's fun to see if I can come up with sounds that work," Keith said. "The audiences are very appreciative."

Real voices

Part of the show's appeal is its familiarity with its audience. Wherever it travels — and the show travels nationwide — fact checkers and researchers learn about the location. One of the keys to getting a local perspective of life is truck driver Russ Ringsak.

Ringsak, who moves equipment for the show to locations in the United States, arrives in town before the rest of the crew. He uses the extra time to research, finding the "kind of stuff you wouldn't get off a Web site or from the Chamber of Com-

merce," he said. Ringsak looks for the used-car lots, small shops and other things a stranger would notice when visiting the town.

His observations are included in sketches on the show and in a column that runs on the "A Prairie Home Companion" Web site.

"It seems like storytelling is a lost art," Ringsak said, noting that conversations today include a lot of "I was like ... and then he was like ... and it was like ..."

But storytelling on "A Prairie Home Companion" is alive and well, as audiences will hear when Keillor spins the latest tale from Lake Wobegon, "where the women are strong, the men are good-looking and the children are above-average."

When "In Search of Lake Wobegon," an exhibit that included Keillor's words and photographs of Central Minnesota taken by National Geographic photographer Richard Olsenius, came to the Stearns County History Museum last spring, Keillor described the location of Lake Wobegon in a news release.

"People want stories to be true. So I started telling people that the town is in Central Minnesota, near Stearns County, up around Holdingford, not far from St. Rosa and Albany and Freeport, northwest of St. Cloud, which is sort of the truth, I guess," he said.



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Saturday, April 26, 2003 7:30 pm

