

'Prairie Home Companion' draws Cobb teens

By Colleen Kelly
Staff Writer

Jeff and Stephen Connelly aren't afraid to admit it.

On some Saturday nights, you'll likely find these two Cobb County teenagers listening to the radio and it won't Z-93's popular rock.

From 6-8 p.m., Jeff, a 16-year-old student at Wheeler High School, and his 13-year-old brother, Stephen, who attends East Cobb Middle School, may be among 3 million listeners nationwide tuned to "A Prairie Home Companion," a funny show about a make-believe town called Lake Wobegon, Minnesota. In Atlanta the show is carried on national public radio's affiliate station, WABE-FM90.

This past weekend, the Connelly brothers and their dad, Al, were among a sellout crowd of 3,688 who packed Smyphony Hall at Atlanta's Woodruff Arts Center for a Friday night rehearsal and Saturday night live performance of "A Prairie Home Companion," starring the show's host Garrison Keillor.

"I like the commercials for stuff like Raw Bits," Stephen said, describing himself as a loyal fan.

"I can see where they're coming from," said Jeff, who doubts that many of his friends have ever heard



JOHNNY CRAWFORD/Staff

"PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION" FANS: Cobb County brothers Stephen Connelly (left) and Jeff Connelly were among crowd at Smyphony Hall performance last weekend.

of the show, which in the past 11 years has become public radio's biggest hit and captured a loyal following. "My friends have never asked me if I listen to the show and I haven't told anyone," said Jeff.

The weekend performances kicked off WABE's fall fund-raising campaign, which seeks contributions from patrons, who, along with corporate sponsors, are needed to pro-

vide the bulk of the station's financing. WBAE spokesman Steve Harris said the local station, which broadcasts without paid commercials, has 105,000 listeners a week and about 10,000 paying members. "That means a lot of people are listening for free," Harris said.

■Listeners who want to contribute can send donations to WABE-FM90, 740 Bismark Rd., Atlanta, Ga. N.E., 30324, or call 873-5431.