

Folksy Keillor gives Norfolk show local touch

By Sam McDonald
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NORFOLK

The 2,400 fans who packed Chrysler Hall Saturday night to see Garrison Keillor got plenty of what they came for: Folksy humor, warm, soothing music, and of course, the news from Lake Wobegon.

But the live broadcast of Keillor's radio show "A Prairie Home Companion" offered a little extra bang for the buck.

Musically speaking, Saturday's crowd and a national radio audience got a chance to bask in pure Virginia sounds, both rural and urban, along with the Minnesota storyteller's more refined brand of harmony.

Folk singer Mike Seeger, who traveled

from outside Lexington to perform, turned in simple, pure renditions of Carter Family songs — acoustic tunes that form part of the foundation of commercial country music. And Portsmouth's own Ruth Brown delivered a bolt of pure R&B energy to an otherwise polite, strait-laced crowd. Her songs "5-10-15 Hours" and a bawdy tune from the hit musical "Black and Blue" portrayed the spicier side of the Old Dominion.

All that was probably by design. As usual, Keillor had done his homework.

He displayed an uncanny command of the area's history and complicated geography, naming the Virginia rivers that empty into the Chesapeake Bay and citing our hometown port as "the deepest natural har-

bor in the world."

He added, "A place where ships come and go is always a place of poetry."

But Keillor's humor isn't built on flattery. He specializes in helping uptight people laugh at themselves. So his brief-but-detailed review of Norfolk's past included plenty on the town's appetite for drinking and the professional women he said were once known as "the debutantes of East Main."

Lutherans — who inhabit many of his stories about small-town Minnesota life — heard much to laugh about Saturday. Keillor's first Lutheran joke came about 5 minutes into the broadcast. "We are a subdued

Please see Keillor/A12