

# Keillor's radio show marks park birthday

By TOM HOWARD  
Of The Gazette Staff

**YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, Wyo.** — A guest appearance by Old Faithful highlighted Saturday's performance of "A Prairie Home Companion," as the radio program served up a happy 125th birthday party for Yellowstone National Park.

The world-famous geyser stole the show about 45 minutes into the two-hour live broadcast. National Park Service naturalist Ann Deutch had just shared her knowledge of Yellowstone's plumbing with host Garrison Keillor. Minutes after Deutch and Keillor finished their discussion on magma, lava and volcanism, Old Faithful sprang to life. Microphones mounted near the geyser picked up the sounds of cascading water and cheering tourists.

"That's the sound of Americans listening to water coming out of the ground," Keillor dead-panned.

The 500 people who filled the Old Faithful Recreation Center, a cavernous log structure just a stone's throw from the geyser, enjoyed two hours of soul-stirring gospel music, a selection of humorous campfire songs, and a glowing tribute to a national treasure, Yellowstone National Park.

"A Prairie Home Companion" usually draws from local material when it's on the road, and Yellowstone provided a wealth of humor for the traveling radio troupe.

Keillor made light of the park's legendary summer crowds, declaring that 3 million visitors were at Old Faithful this weekend.

Fictitious radio sponsors included "Jackson Hole Wheat Biscuits" and "Old Faithful Bottled Water," guaranteed to make you belch every 13 minutes. Former Montana congressman Pat Williams made his "Prairie Home Companion" debut as a tightlipped dead-eye spitter named "Ptoeey" during the weekly installment of a radio soap opera called "Lives of the Cowboys."

"If you're a Democrat in Wyoming, you've got to learn how to spit like that," Williams said after hitting a frying pan with a gob of spit from a quarter-mile away.

## Review

Later, during a serious on-air conversation, Williams and Keillor provided some historical perspective on Yellowstone's 125th birthday. "It's a great idea that wondrous places can be set aside and belong to all people," Williams said. He credited Native Americans as the first to come up with the notion that the earth belongs to everybody.

Yellowstone Superintendent Mike Finley said the nation's birthday is a time to reflect on the gifts enjoyed by all Americans: the gift of liberty; a flexible Constitution; and a national will to preserve things that are unique, beautiful and historic. He urged Americans to join the Park Service in protecting America's national heritage.

In an interview after the show, Williams credited Finley for coming up with the idea of inviting "A Prairie Home Companion" to help celebrate Yellowstone's 125th birthday.

Saturday's program was a reunion for Williams and Keillor. During his years in Congress, Williams worked to preserve the National Endowment for the Arts and Keillor stumped for Williams in Montana during a congressional race four years ago.

Dressed in a black tuxedo coat and red socks, Keillor was his usual cool self on the air. His booming baritone voice blended smoothly with "A Prairie Home Companion" regulars Kate MacKenzie and Robin and Linda Williams.

Skip Gorman, a cowboy singer from New Hampshire of all places, rounded up a musical performance with old-time cowboy tunes and a rousing solo on a fiddle.

The audience got a chance to participate as well, singing selections like "America the Beautiful" and "Amazing Grace" to the tune of the "Mickey Mouse Club" theme song.

Few would argue that YNP is a national treasure. After Saturday's performance, plenty of people were saying the same thing about Garrison Keillor and "A Prairie Home Companion."