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NEWSDAY, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2001

Parade for Patriots

Columbus Day takes on deeper meaning

By Bryan Virasami
STAFF WRITER

The people in the crowd came in many colors, but red, white and blue seemed etched in their hearts and minds during yesterday's Columbus Day Parade along Fifth Avenue.

As workers continued to search the rubble of the World Trade Center at Ground Zero and the military fired missiles into Afghanistan, thousands turned out for a parade that was more a display of American patriotism than a celebration of the life of its namesake explorer.

"I don't usually come to the Columbus Day Parade because I have questions about who discovered America, but I came because of the crisis and I thank God for America," said Leemyria Kimble of the Bronx, who brought her 8-year-old nephew, Christopher.

Dozens of floats, bands from high schools and military schools, and fire trucks — most of which were from out of town — marched behind politicians and law enforcement contingents.

"It's a great time for everybody to come together in a nice patriotic way," said Peter Holsberg, 33, a Manhattan teacher. "It's nice to see so many people out in such good spirits."



Newsday Photo / Julia Gaines

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton march.

While the crowd lined up three and four deep near the start of the parade at 44th Street, the number of spectators thinned out north of Central Park South. The parade, which organizers had dubbed the "Columbus Day Parade Celebrates America," officially ended at 70th Street.

Those who showed up said they came for a special reason. Maria Elena Garcia, 49, of College

See COLUMBUS on A26

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NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

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A Patriotic Parade

COLUMBUS from A21

Point could hardly have made a greater display of her American spirit. In addition to a T-shirt with a large U.S. flag on it, Garcia wore a black beret that belongs to one of her two sons, both of whom are in the armed forces. A smaller flag was stitched into the beret, and another one was pinned to it. Garcia also held a flag, which she vigorously waved at the marchers.

She credited her two sons with inspiring her patriotism: One is in the Army, stationed in Korea, and the other is in the Air Force, based in Portugal and fueling planes and ships headed for the Middle East, she said.

In a recent phone conversation, Garcia said her son in Korea had encouraged her not to allow the attacks to frighten her.

"He said, 'Mom, don't be afraid. New York is the safest place right now,' " Garcia said. "I'm very proud of them and we're going to do a good job. America will prevail."

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was met with occasional applause but the crowd hardly seemed to notice the other politicians marching, which included Democratic mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer, who walked with former U.S. Rep. Geraldine Ferraro, Council Speaker Peter Vallone (D-Astoria) and Norman Siegel, a Democratic candidate for public advocate. Democrat Mark Green, Ferrer's runoff opponent, and Republican mayoral candidate Michael Bloomberg also marched.

A large contingent of Oregonians, who traveled to New York in response to the mayor's call to visit the city and help its recovery by spending money, appeared to be the most popular group in the parade.

Most of the Oregonians, such as Guay Markham, 63, donned "Oregon Loves NY" T-shirts, shook hands and hugged many strangers along Fifth Avenue.

"I guess you can call me a hug therapist. We cried with people along the way too," said Markham, who is spending five nights in the city. "We're not strangers anymore; we're all in this together."

Robin Merlo, a public relations representative from Manhattan, yelled out a thank-you to every Oregonian who passed.

"It's a real boost for us New Yorkers and it shows people out of state care for us," she said.

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