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Smithsonian Brings New York City to DC

By SHANNON McCAFFREY, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - There are the skyscrapers and the subways. The street graffiti and the art museums. The stock trader and the pizza maker. The Yankees and the Mets.

But what is New York City really?

For the last three years New York native Nancy Groce has been trying to get at the city's essence. All so she could transport it to Washington.

This week, visitors to the nation's capital will see what she came up with as the Smithsonian Institution ([news](#) - [web sites](#))'s annual Folklife Festival opens on the National Mall featuring a sprawling display on New York City.

"We tried to really capture that lovely neighborhood feeling in New York," said Groce, who is curator of the festival. "We wanted to go beyond what the New York tourists see when they spend the weekend in a Times Square hotel and come away saying, 'Wow, it's great place, but I wouldn't want to live there.'"

The 25-tent festival tucked between the Capitol and the Washington Monument shuns traditional tourist icons like the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building. Instead it attempts to capture the New York that New Yorkers know, honing in on the city's patchwork of neighborhoods and paying homage to the ordinary.

Two of the most visible symbols of New York on the mall will be a giant water tower, like the ones perched on countless New York rooftops, and a subway car from the No. 7 train to Queens, which the Metropolitan Transportation Authority ([news](#) - [external web site](#)) pulled from the tracks just six weeks ago to ship to Washington.

Even the most tourist-oriented of the exhibits - such as the section on Broadway - are designed to take a slightly offbeat approach. Instead of presenting a finished show, it will feature actors and a director engrossed in a live rehearsal for "Little Shop of Horrors."

"It's the process, not the finished product," said Stephen Kidd, program assistant for the festival.

There also will be a peek behind the curtain with costume makers, makeup artists and prop handlers imported from the New York's theater district.

At a Wall Street exhibit, real traders will teach passers-by their trade on a replica of the New York Stock Exchange ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) floor. It's hand signals and technique only, Kidd said - no advice on hedge funds.

Another exhibit will have Fashion Institute of Technology students dressing store windows and a mannequin maker at work.

There will live musical acts, ranging from Caribbean rhythms to Irish reels to Jewish klezmer. On a large stage, Harlem's famed Apollo Theater will hold its first-ever amateur night outside New York.

About 300 New Yorkers in all are heading to Washington to take part in the interactive festival. There will

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be Sam Chwat, a dialect coach who teaches actors how to mimic a New York accent; Tats Cru, a group of graffiti artists who will create a giant mural; and bus driver Tony Palombella, who cracks jokes while he drives a crosstown bus.

Members of the group Streetplay will do just that - play on sidewalks poured on the mall to accommodate the urban pastimes of handball, hopscotch and stickball.

"I've been having long, very serious discussions about exactly how to design sidewalks with them," Kidd said.

And then there's Steve Ross, who will demonstrate how to make bagels and bialys by hand. His secret? New York City water.

The third-generation owner of Coney Island Bialy and Bagel Bakery is shipping 36 gallons to Washington so the bagels are just right.

"I don't know what it is exactly, but it seems to make a difference," Ross said. "Must be the chemicals."

Groce said she and 40 field workers canvassed New York City for several years doing interviews to gather the raw material for the festival. Those interviews - encompassing hundreds of hours of tape - will be stored in the Smithsonian's folklike archives.

"There's surprisingly little on urban areas like New York," Groce said. "Now if someday someone needs to know how to make a neon sign, we'll have a record on tape."

The \$1.2 million exhibit is being funded through a combination of public and private money.

The festival runs from Wednesday to July 1, and again from July 4 to July 8. Most exhibits are open from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Some dance parties and concerts will be held in the early evening. All events are free.

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On the Net:

Folklife Festival: <http://www.folklife.si.edu/festival2001info.htm>

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