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Convention protests aim at fame

Bell-ringing, vomiting and 1,000 flag-draped coffins are scheduled as protesters flock to New York City.

By Susan Greene
Denver Post Staff Writer

New York City
- While thousands of activists prepare to march against President Bush, Marina Potok has a quirkier way of protesting.



Post / Glenn Asakawa

A man who identified himself as "Vermin Supreme" jokes Thursday with New York City police gathering to escort protesters along Broadway. The march was considered a dry run for Sunday's larger protest against the GOP convention and the Bush administration, which is expected to draw up to 300,000.

The 30-year-old artist organizes a group of volunteers to stuff their faces with food, then vomit before large audiences.

The Vomitorium, as Potok calls it, seeks to expose what she sees as the greed and gluttony of the Bush administration.

That event and dozens of other unusual or outlandish protests tied to the Republican National Convention mark a shift of political dissent beyond street marches and toward street theater.

"Standing around waving a sign in the street won't get you very far. And we all know that images of police arresting us, labeling us as violent, is exactly what the Republicans want," said Potok, who went to high school and college in Colorado.

Lenny Alcivar, press secretary for the convention,

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said protests are mainly the concern of New York City, which he said has done "a tremendous job in assuring us the city can host a successful event ... allowing us to focus on the business of re-electing President Bush."

The convention, which begins Monday, invites comparisons to the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, where police shot tear gas and clubbed protesters. The televised violence may have helped Republican Richard Nixon by cementing his image as the law-and-order candidate.

So some in New York are daring to be different.

Demonstrations against the GOP include self-described "queers and trannies" biking against Bush, an event distributing 50,000 bells to New Yorkers to "ring out Republicans," and a quarter-mile parade of pallbearers carrying 1,000 flag-draped empty coffins to symbolize the soldiers killed in Iraq.

Members of the street-theater group Billionaires for Bush are ready to don fake jewels and tuxedos and adopt names like Tex Shelter and Meg A. Bucks. Their events include a vigil for corporate welfare, taunting other protesters standing in a symbolic unemployment line and a croquet party in Central Park.

A group called the A31 Action Coalition is calling for a citywide day of creative, nonviolent mischief Tuesday.

Activists plan small sit-ins without permits outside banks and corporations doing business with the Bush administration. Some have set up a "snitch line" to allow left-leaning service workers to report Republican gatherings, some of which are supposed to be secret.

"I hope it's written about in the history books," said Jeremy Bernier, a 22-year-old Denverite heading to New York this weekend as part of a group of young activists called Creative Resistance. "I hope that people will remember this time as a point where people were fed up."

Delegates are being shuttled to and from most convention events and, for security reasons, have been advised not to walk the streets wearing convention credentials or anything else identifying them as Republicans. Lilly Nunez, a delegate from Littleton, said she hopes to avoid protesters during her week and a half in New York.

"We don't even see them," she said. "They keep them away from us."

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