

Star struck

The ratings monster known as American Idol is taking over the Wachovia Center later this month for auditions, and the area is preparing for the crowds.

By [David Goncalves](#)
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Home of Fabian and Frankie Avalon, South Philly has always had talent roaming its streets. Some even went on to the vaulted status of Idol, be it Pop Idol or Teen Idol.

With the final round of auditions for its upcoming season to take place at the Wachovia Center, 3601 Broad St., the time has come for an "American Idol" to possibly be plucked from our stoops and street corners.

Stopping in Philadelphia for the first time in its seven seasons, "American Idol" will wrap up its roughly month-long trek across the United States Aug. 27 in South Philadelphia. In previous years, the search for star power ended in New York, forcing singers from all over to flock to the city for one last shot at getting that coveted gold card and a pass to Hollywood per Simon, Paula and Randy. And now, all those with stars in their eyes will come to the area with just one goal — to be the next "American Idol."

And if a quarter of viewers who watch the show — 30 million the norm — show up, this year's audition crowd could be larger than those before it.

Though the "Idol" Web site warns "no one will be allowed to line up prior to 6 a.m. Aug. 25," this is still a full two days before the auditions begin — and there will be Phillies home-game crowds to compound the numbers.

"San Diego's in town and then the Mets are in town," Eric Nemeth, Comcast Spectacor's director of public relations for the Wachovia Complex, said of the ballgames. "We'll be in constant communication with the police department and [the stadiums] across the street ... just to make sure everyone's in the loop.

"We have a lot of experience when handling large numbers of people," he continued. "There were times during Phillies' games when we had large numbers of people — a sold-out Phillies game, a sold-out Roger Waters show. We'll be working with the 'American Idol' people so we can know what to expect as far as what their experiences are as far as other cities go, so we'll be prepared to handle it."

According to the Fourth District's Sgt. Catalini, officers "do not have any orders on [the auditions] yet."

Aware of the potential for sleepovers, "Idol" organizers have taken some precaution of their own to deter the all-to-eager. Their Web site lists items, including tents and mattresses, that can lead to immediate disqualification.

More than 10,000 hopefuls swamped the California auditions last year and, though the exact number cannot be calculated yet, the City of Brotherly Love should brace itself.

"We'll be working with the people at 'American Idol' to get their barometer on how big it's going to be," Nemeth said. "We expect it to be massive. When we announced [the auditions], the response was enormous. We expect this to be huge."

Packer Park Civic Association President Barbara Capozzi knows the numbers can't be avoided, but the welcome sign comes with some ground rules.

"We have a routine, a protocol," she said regarding large groups.

She is a little wary, however, due to the competition's size. "We don't like events that attract large groups," Capozzi said. "It's not that we don't like [the people], we just don't like to clean the trash they leave around our neighborhood."

Sports Complex Special Services District (SCSSD) Executive Director Shawn Jalouski is confident things

will remain under control.

"Comcast-Spectacor, the Phillies and the Eagles all do an excellent job of keeping SCSSD informed on event plans and remaining mindful of adjacent neighborhood concerns," he said.

As for the group's course of action, nothing is set in stone yet, but Jalousinski added, "as always, SCSSD will participate in efforts undertaken by the City and venue operators to ensure that event operations are well-planned and minimize any negative impacts on adjacent residential communities."

With registration beginning Aug. 25, but competition not commencing until two days later, contestants will have time to browse, eat and shop and local businesses are looking forward to the big numbers.

"I hope so," Ralph Medora, proprietor of Italian restaurant Medora's Mecca, 3101 S. 13th St. , said. "Anything they can bring."

Size doesn't matter, Medora said, as "the city and the parking and everybody who is involved, they handle [these types of events] very well." Aware the spotlight will be on South Philly in particular, Medora added, "I think anything that comes into the area that is something to benefit the area helps out all the businesses."

One business that should be affected by the influx are local hotels, but some don't think the competition will draw people from too far, possibly cutting down on the numbers needing rooms.

"If anyone comes, they'll be from the tri-state area," Nina Timnani, a sales representative for Sheraton Suites Philadelphia Airport, 4101 B Island Ave., said.

Possible, since many major cities are in close proximity and the commute can boil down to a quick road trip.

"They might come for the day and camp out, but we're not expecting much business from them," Tamnani added.

When the event finally hits, all ducks should be in a row.

"We are extremely excited, this is the seventh season and the first time they've come into Philadelphia," Nemeth said. "Not only that, the Wachovia Center gets to be the host. We get national attention, which is always positive for South Philly and also for the Greater Philadelphia region."
