

Big homecoming in works

BY SUE SCHULTZ
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HIGH POINT — City leaders say they plan to celebrate the national attention Fantasia Barrino has garnered from her success on television's "American Idol."

Although there is no word yet on when the 19-year-old High Point native may return to the Triad, plans for a homecoming are already under way.

The Friends of Fantasia, a group of businesses and supporters of Barrino, and the High Point Chamber of Commerce plan to meet early next week to plan a celebration in her honor, said Tonia Stephenson, vice president of business development for the chamber.

Stephenson said they are waiting to hear from "Ameri-

can Idol" producers and other entertainment managers about when Barrino will be available to return to High Point.

Earlier this week, elected leaders discussed possible celebrations that include a block party or homecoming parade.

Two weeks ago, Mayor Becky Smothers presented Barrino with a key to the city at a performance she gave for more than 3,000 local fans. The city also proclaimed May 14 as "Fantasia Barrino Day."

However the city decides to honor Barrino, it will come with a price tag.

During the past two months, the city has provided police security for viewing parties at Providence Place, along with protection and crowd control earlier this month for her appearance.



KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/The Associated Press.

Fantasia Barrino performs "Dreams" during the "American Idol" finale in Los Angeles.

Lt. Gordon Stallings, who has helped supervise some of the Barrino events, said the city has used both off-duty officers with overtime pay and on-duty

officers to staff the events. Police officials haven't yet calculated the amount of overtime the added security has cost the city.

Stallings said police also would be responsible for security at the celebration.

This year, the city budgeted about \$712,000 for overtime costs to provide services for after-hours events.

When asked Wednesday by NBC's "Today" show producers about whether Barrino is the biggest thing to hit the city, Smothers laughed: "Yes, it is. At least since last month, when we had 70,000 people come through for the International Home Furnishings Market."

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