

# Security Blanket

**NEW YORK** — It's every security officer's nightmare: A crowd of 5,000 to 10,000 loud, flamboyantly dressed, demanding people, all of whom are either real VIPs or legends in their own minds.

That description also applies to the typical daily foot traffic through the Bryant Park tents during Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, which makes for an interesting security balancing act.

Fern Mallis, executive director of show organizer 7th on Sixth, was reluctant to disclose many details about the security precautions put in place by show management.

She did say the show organizers have been working with the same private security firm, Citadel, for the shows' 10-year history. That, she said, provides the advantage of having security officials who are familiar with the personalities and peculiarities of the fashion industry. /

"We feel completely and totally confident in the good judgement of our security officials and their understanding of

our industry," she said. "They don't make any judgements on something that another firm might be worried about."

For instance, many security officials might get a little nervous if they saw a man dressed like a pirate swaggering into a fancy party — but someone with fashion industry experience would consider the possibility that person might just be John Galliano.

Mallis declined to say how many security guards are on duty during the shows, noting only that it was an "appropriate number" that fluctuated.

The New York Police Department has a detail of officers at the tents during the shows, as well, according to an NYPD spokeswoman. She said the size of the NYPD detail also fluctuates, but did not disclose how many officers it typically includes.

For those who venture beyond the tents to various Seventh Avenue showrooms, the Fashion Center Business Improvement District for the past year has had its security officers on the streets seven days a week, supplementing the officers from the NYPD's Midtown South precinct.

FCBID executive director Barbara Randall said her force of about 23 security guards patrols the streets from 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. daily. On Saturdays and Sundays, about nine guards are on the streets.

Within the tents, show organizers also have to juggle the various security details of certain celebrities, politicians (and their progeny) and other luminaries who attend the shows.

"Before every single show — and I don't mean 10 minutes before — we have meetings with each company, production meetings where security is discussed," Mallis said. "If they are going to have special VIPs who require certain security details, backstage entry or whatever the case may be, there's always a meeting, so there is never any misunderstanding of who's handling what. Some people want their security details around then and our security is sensitive to that. They know when to clear the runways, when to move people away, when to give people breathing space."

Because the shows are invitation-only events, Mallis said much of the security focus is on ensuring only people with invites make it into the tents.

"We don't have metal detectors and we're not asking for passports and photo ID's, but they need to have an invite or we politely tell them they can't come in," she said. "If we were about to start checking tote bags and the handbags that people in this industry carry, there would never be a show that started on time and fashion week would take about three weeks to execute."

— **Scott Malone**