

Mobs of ground supporters vow to make Madame President

‘WE HAVE to fight,” said campaign volunteer Peter Yacobellis at one of the many Stand up for Hillary rallies that have taken Manhattan by storm over the past few days.

Yesterday, Mr Yacobellis was working a 15-hour shift, going door-to-door motivating voters to the polls, driving the elderly and spending every spare minute on his mobile persuading voters to cast their ballots.

Mobs of motivated supporters have materialised in the run up to today’s Super Tuesday push. Some 25,000 Clinton campaign volunteers are out brandishing “Vote for Hillary” signs and joining in the citywide chant of “Madame President”.

Since dawn, little mobs covered in Hillary stickers were congregating on street corners to energise passing motorists with placards and cheers.

A group of women called the Manhattan Ambassadors, who have been networking for the senator in their social circles, have shifted their strategy from gentle persuasion to an unapologetic pushing out of the vote.

Thousands of volunteers are manning phone banks, capitalising on the excitement built by Sunday’s vibrant march of the “Hillstars” along Broadway to Central Park.

“There’s been a groundswell of people coming to help out,” Clinton spokesman Frank Rothman told the Irish Examiner. “The campaign isn’t taking anything for granted, so we’re working hard.”

It’s been a long slog to Super Tuesday for Hillary’s army. In the past week alone there have been a dozen or more simultaneous events, 63 state-wide debate parties, sign painting, literature distribution, and 31 call centres working round the clock.

“The energy is very determined,” said Mr Rothman. “Everyone is willing to give their time and work hard.”

But this isn’t the only campaign with increased visibility in New York City. The bastion of liberalism may be barren ground for Republican hopefuls, but Senator Barack Obama’s campaign sneaked into Ms Clinton’s backyard.

While her volunteers were taking over Union Square, the Obama campaign was throwing a bash downtown with the promise, “all you have to do is show up and bring some energy”.

With happy hour gatherings to build a sense of community, artists inviting people to their studios to



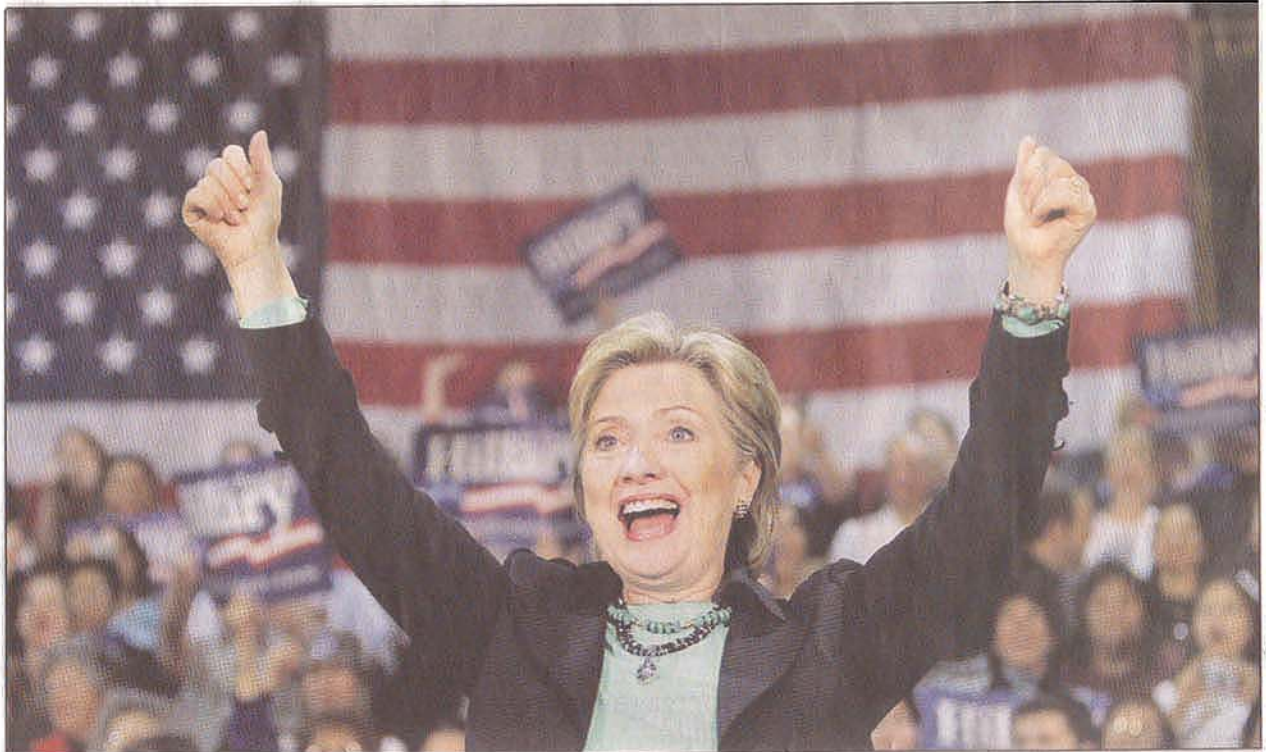
25,000 Clinton campaigners take the city by storm in the run-up to Super Tuesday, writes Karen McCarthy in New York

paint signs, a rally of young voters at MTV in Time Square, and a “Blast for Barack” fundraiser last night in the East Village, the interloping senator seems to be the cool kid on the block.

At a rally in Union Square on Saturday, a lone Obama supporter showed up with a table, a handful of posters and a volunteer sign-up sheet.

“We don’t follow their site,” Gabriel Monroy laughed from the middle of the raucous Clinton horde. They continued to cheer behind him as predominantly young, white New Yorkers thronged to his sparse table looking for buttons and bills. Within an hour he signed up 50 volunteers. “It’s not about age,” he insisted as three teenagers skateboarded to the table, eager to scrawl their names on the “count me in” list.

Devotees are not all that have drifted Mr Obama’s way. He raised an estimated \$32 million (about €22m)



Hillary Clinton: The former first lady’s campaign bought an hour on the Hallmark Channel last night, as well as Spanish-language TV ads and African-American radio spots hosted by Magic Johnson but they won’t comment on the extent of their media buy.

The volunteers

in January — the largest monthly haul ever by a presidential candidate during a primary — and he used it to boost his advertising buy in the 10-day dash through 22 states. Overall, millions were spent on an advertising blitz ahead of this pivotal day. All campaigns claim their advertising plans are significant, but with costs varying radically across markets and within states, determining the bottom line is almost impossible to all but campaign finance insiders.

The two democratic teams are rumoured to have an estimated weekly spend of \$2m each on TV advertising. Republican Governor Mitt Romney is reportedly advertising in California where a week-long broadcast campaign costs upwards of \$3m.

The Clinton campaign bought an

hour on the Hallmark Channel last night, as well as Spanish-language TV ads and African-American radio spots hosted by Magic Johnson, but like Senator John “Maverick” McCain’s campaign, they won’t comment on the extent of their media buy.

Advertising during the Super Bowl Sunday this weekend cost \$3m for a 30-second spot, making even “Millionaire Mitt” look like a pauper compared with the reputed \$8 billion annual advertising budget of corporate giant Procter and Gamble.

Costs like these have forced campaigns to use alternative marketing methods. As tireless campaign foot soldiers lead the charge, Mr Obama is drawing strong cyber support from social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook and his own mybarackobama.com.

Ms Clinton’s prolific bloggers continue unabated while Facebook

and MySpace supporters are replacing their own photos with Ms Clinton’s for a last-ditch visibility drive.

While she is expected to have an overwhelming victory in New York and the surrounding areas, she did not make an appearance in the state herself, despite the 468 delegates and 5.4 million registered Democrats up for grabs. Her democratic rival didn’t show either. The pundits say it’s because he can’t win and she can’t lose.

But more and more New Yorkers are rallying for Mr Obama. Snippets of conversations like “the thing about Obama is...” whizz past on the bustling streets as the Obama buzz intensifies.

Bar owner, Barry McCormick from Navan, says he’ll probably vote for Ms Clinton because of her involvement with the peace process in the North, but admits the war is swaying a lot of his punters.

“I think she has a chance to change it,” he said. “I don’t think Obama has a shot.”

Beatrice Clairawetcher, a Pakistani-born restaurant owner in Manhattan says her young customers are gravitating towards the African-American senator, but female patrons fear he lacks experience and are leaning towards Ms Clinton.

No New York City tirade is complete without the spirited opinions of the yellow cab drivers who spend most of their off-peak mobile phone minutes in heated conversation. These days the elections are dominating the discussion.

One driver, Mohammed Kachem from Bangladesh, said he likes Mr Obama because unlike Ms Clinton, who has a huge political machine behind her, he’s doing this on his own.

“If Obama is elected the whole world will change,” he said.