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Ashanti parades her love of food, family and News

BY ANDREW S. GARIB
DAILY NEWS WRITER

EVERYONE KNOWS ASHANTI is smokin' — but did you know she cooks too?

The Grammy-winning songbird graced the Daily News float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade — but before she sang for the thousands who lined the route and the millions watching at home, she talked with New York's Hometown Paper.

"I'm all about family. Everyone comes over. I do about 80% of the cooking. I do the big bird, do the cabbage, do the mac & cheese, do a special orange chicken — that's my special secret recipe," the Long Island-born R&B beauty revealed.

There's "rice and peas, and sometimes, if I'm the mood, I'll try some fish," like whiting or flounder, she said.

"My cousin will do the collard greens, black-eyed peas," she continued, her aunt does the pies, and her sister does the cakes.

Ashanti, 28, said she's happy to be home for the holidays — and was thrilled to be in yesterday's parade.

She came prepared for the chilly weather: "I had to get some fake fur stuff. I don't want any problems," she joked.

As for the dinner she headed for, she gushed: "I just love being with family, being home, being able to chill out . . . a lot of family, kids running around, a lot of food."

"The women want to change the channel, but football is on — you know how that is," she joked.

This year is extra-special, she noted, be-



R&B star Ashanti graces Daily News float yesterday. Photo by Todd Maisel/Daily News

cause of the hope and inspiration flowing from the election of Barack Obama.

"Amazing, it's amazing. I'm definitely thankful for that," she said, noting her late grandfather was a civil rights activist.

"It's very touching. I hope he's watching too," she said of the President-elect. "At least the girls [Malia and Sasha Obama] will be watching."

"Even though we're in a recession, it's always good to be thankful for family," she also said.

Then she gave a shoutout to her friends at the Daily News, saying she loves gossip gurus George Rush and Joanna Molloy.

"Of course, I'm a reader — I see myself in it enough," she laughed. "I like Rush & Molloy, the juicy stuff. But the important stuff is good, too."