

This Convention Is the Craaaziest!

By Philip L. Burgert
A Member of the Staff

Just because The Astonishing Neal rode a bicycle blindfolded from Bartle Hall to Children's Mercy Hospital Tuesday afternoon does not mean he should be considered unusual.

And the fact that Morris Katz' agent bills him as the "King of Schlock" because he produces oil paintings in five minutes is no reason to put him down.

At least not in the company of other novelty acts appearing here at the National Entertainment and Campus Activities Association convention, which will run through Saturday. The other performers include hypnotists, one-man bands, jugglers, palm readers, clowns, cartoonists and psychics.

"There are a lot of weirdos at this convention," said Ms. Lisa Cagan, an association staff member. "Almost every kind."

The "weirdos" have gathered to market their skills to 2,500 college programmers who book shows on their campuses in what has grown into a \$500-million-a-year market for talent. Novelty acts are used as ice-breakers at campus social events, officials said.

Neal, who reveals only his stage name "for personal reasons," was delivering 25 pounds of Valentine's Day candy to Mercy Hospital officials to try to gain publicity for himself and the convention.

"I can actually sense things around me," he

said before half dollars were taped over his eyes and they were covered with a blindfold.

He then wobbled off on his bicycle down Broadway to Pershing and continued on to Hospital Hill, riding behind a taxicab. Katz said he could sense the taxicab, using it as one of his main points of reference on the trip, which was about 15 blocks long.

Although he ran several red lights, his only other visible trouble came when he lost power on the rented 10-speed bicycle while climbing Hospital Hill, became disoriented and walked part way up the hill.

Among other things he sensed, he said, were
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colors, materials, objects and people around him. Neal said the technique of sensing surrounding objects can be developed by anyone and is one that many blind people possess.

Neal began experimenting with his psychic powers while studying psychology at Penn State University. "I began by concentrating on objects so hard that I could actually feel them," he said. "I've always been interested in unusual things."

The Windgap, Pa., resident is billed as "the world's foremost parapsychologist," and, while blindfolded, has previously driven the lead car at the Pocono Indy 500 at a speed of more than 100

miles an hour, his promoter says.

Even so, he said of the bicycle ride, "I think really it was the most dangerous thing I've ever done."

Katz, a New Yorker, is also known as the "world's fastest painter." He claims to create more than 15,000 oil paintings each year, working with a palette knife and toilet paper instead of brushes.

Katz, a native of Poland, prides himself on being "the people's painter" and prices his paintings from \$20 to \$250.

Although he says his works are in museums as well as private collections, he admits "they're not in the major museums yet. They won't let me in."

Katz is more than willing to talk about all the television shows and magazine articles that have featured him. And as far as competition with other novelty artists at the convention goes, Katz said, "It doesn't matter. I'm the only one with a show."

Both Katz and Neal admit their aim here is to expand their business in the college market.

"They get bookings," Ms. Cagan said. "They get lots of bookings."