

Material Girl

Madonnathon: a mecca for her fans

BY JOE BAUMAN
STAFF WRITER

Michigan's "Material Girl" would have been proud.

A handful of Madonna-wannabes joined several hundred fans and fanatics Sunday for the first-ever Madonnathon staged at the Holiday Inn in Southfield.

The spectacle was held to honor Madonna, a Rochester native, on her 34th birthday. Madonnathon '92 actually took place over a two-day period and included a lip-synch competition and bus tour of where the entertainer grew up, went to school at Rochester Adams High School and allegedly got her first kiss.

While the singer, dancer and actor makes millions of dollars from her concerts and record sales, vendors hawking her likeness at Sunday's convention in a too-small conference room found themselves making money hand over fist themselves, selling practically anything with Madonna's face (or other body parts) on it.

"We do shows all over the country, but nothing has compared to this," said Karen Cunnely, who traveled with her husband from Syracuse, N.Y., to sell music paraphernalia. "We've actually done better here than at the KISS shows, which is pretty hard to believe."

And what possesses someone to imitate the controversial musician in appearance and part with hundreds of dollars for a piece of Madonna folklore?

"She's just so cool, and she really makes a statement for women's

rights," gushed 16-year-old Kathy Bailey, who convinced her parents to drive her and her 14-year-old friend Jennifer O'Shay from their St. Clair Shores home to "experience" the worship of their hero.

In fact, given the media presence at the event, you would have thought that Madonna herself was there. Those entered in the look-alike contest, won by 18-year-old Jennifer Gray of Chicago, practically trampled one another to pose for television cameras and conduct interviews with the media hordes.

"I'm going to be on CNN," shrieked one contestant, while another needed help from a friend staying on her feet after "doing" an interview with MTV.

As fans continued to snap up Madonna T-shirts, albums, trading cards and other items, two young women from London, Ontario, made a desperate plea to a reporter and photographer to buy their media credentials so they could go on the bus tour.

"We just have to go see where Madonna lived, but all of the seats are sold out," said one, adding that the seats were going for \$25 a pop.

When it was suggested the two simply follow the bus on its route in their car, the other said, "It just wouldn't be the same. We need to hear what the guide says about what we are seeing."

One of the biggest draws was a booth sponsored by Madonna's Paris — yes, Paris as in France — fan club, which claimed to have the rarest Madonna pin around for only \$10.



JERRY ZOVANSKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

I won, I won: Jennifer Gray of Chicago clutches an official Blonde Ambition tour jacket she received for winning a Madonna look-alike contest.

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