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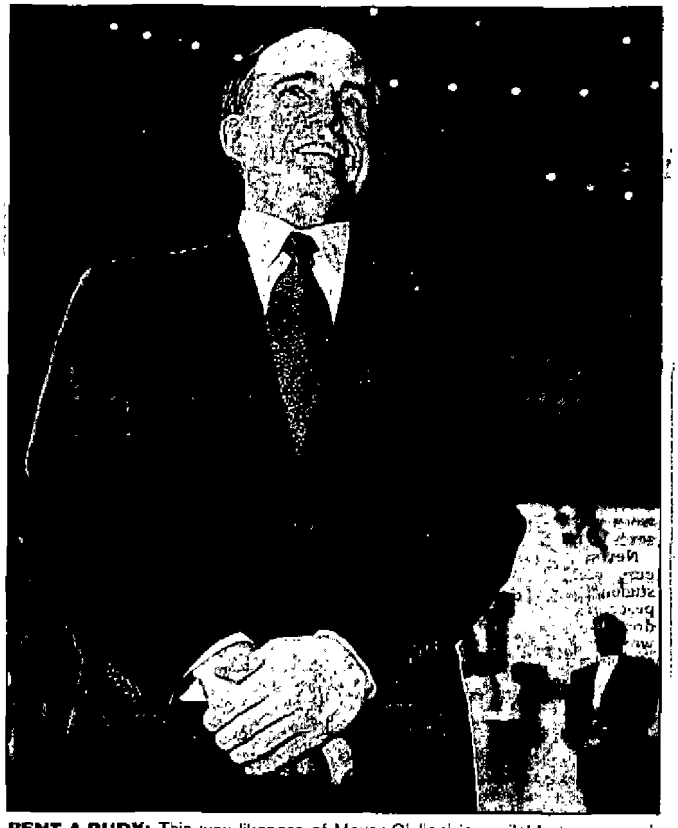

RENT-A-RUDY: This wax likeness of Mayor Giuliani is available to grace private parties and conventions. New York Post: Tamara Beckwith

NYC to wax touristic with celebrity dummies

By PAUL THARP

It usually costs $100,000 or more to get the likes of Oprah Winfrey or Bette Midler to mingle and schmooze at your convention.

But New York City is so strapped to get tourism up and running again, it's offering a Who's Who of big names to rub shoulders in the crowds at your conventions here — all for free.

Rubbing shoulders, however, is about all those stellar names and faces can do.

They're wax, but work better than the real thing for snapshots back home. No pushy bodyguards or celebrity tantrums to spoil your brush with fame.

Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum is offering up its gallery of rouges, titans, luminaries and other faces from history to be free center-piece gimmicks at tourism events over the next year.

Techie conventions can have either Bill Gates or Albert Einstein at the head table. Fashion crowds can feature Princess Di or Marilyn Monroe.

The wax museum is part of a sweeping initiative by the city's tourism agency.

Among other waxy celebs ready to help: Woody Allen, Bette Midler, Nicholas Cage, Hugh Grant, Oprah Winfrey, Donald Trump and Mayor Giuliani.

The mayor's wax alter-ego showed up to give the first freebie event at last week's tourism convention by BizBash.com at the Javits convention center.

The wax museum is part of a sweeping initiative by the city's tourism agency, NYC & Co., to give as many perks as possible to help boost travel here.

Applauding the effort yesterday was the opening session of the American Society of Travel Agents.

The 26,000-member group abruptly switched its annual meeting from Spain to New York to help restore tourism here. Members pledged to book 10 tourists apiece here under the discount initiative.

Besides half-prices on airfare and hotel packages, other added features include playing basketball on the Knicks court and getting walk-on parts in Broadway shows.

New York lost a big chunk of its $25 billion annual tourism business from the Sept. 11 terror attack, with the entire nation losing about $1 billion in canceled conventions alone, said NYC & Co.

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