

Adventurous? Have we got a city for you!

Bicentennial throngs! Welcome to Philadelphia! Soon you will be seeing Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell. But first (since you have no choice), let us tell you what awaits you—Hare Krishna kids at the airport, the Penrose Avenue Bridge and the thrills of traveling by SEPTA.



The Krishna gauntlet

By Murray Dubin
Inquirer Staff Writer

The first words of welcome a Bicentennial visitor gets at Philadelphia International Airport may well come from Michele Donohue, who wears a nose ring, Richard Torreti, who wears a wig, or some of their friends.

That welcome—for many, the first verbal hint of Bicentennial Philadelphia—will sound like this:

"Hi, interested in transcendental meditation?"

"Hey, soldier, where you coming from?"

"Hare Krishna."

The peaceful Hare Krishna greeting has been lost on airport officials, who bristle at the continued presence of the Krishna devotees.

"I'm biding my time," says William T. Burns, director of aviation, who has been waging a losing one-

year battle against the devotees of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness of Philadelphia, 424 E. Woodlawn St.

"I've got complaints about them up to my armpits," Burns says "the complaints aren't about the ideals of these people. They're about the tactics, about the aggressiveness of these disciples of Hare Krishna, who or whatever he is."

Ravindra Svarupa Dasa, Krishna temple president, denies that the devotees assigned to the airport are rude or overly aggressive. Actually,

he says the police have been rude to the Krishna people by "interfering with their activities."

"If someone goes away and thinks less of the Krishna movement, we've failed," he says. "We don't want to offend anyone, but if someone is, what should we do? Stop spreading the love of God?"

Miss Donohue, 22, a Krishna devotee from 11th and McKean Streets, whose nose ring is a symbol of chastity, explains the aggressiveness in another way: "We see ourselves as (See AIRPORT on 4-B)

After the Krishna gauntlet, try transcending our bridge

AIRPORT, From 1-B
doctors prescribing medicine that people don't want to take. We know it will cure the disease."

To make the medicine seem more attractive, the Krishna devotees have forsaken their saffron robes and shaved heads and wear ordinary clothes at the airport. Torreti, 29, of East Oak Lane, wears a wig.

"People were distressed by the robes," he says simply. "The wig puts people at ease."

About a year ago, the Krishna sect sued the city to prevent alleged harassment of its religious activities at the airport. The police had brought disorderly conduct and trespassing charges against some of the members.

Ten months ago, both sides agreed to drop their respective legal actions in a consent order in U. S. District Court. Perhaps even more important, the consent order described the Krishna movement as authentic, and said that its members could perform necessary rituals — such as spreading the word of God and soliciting contributions — in public places such as the airport.

Krishna officials say the contributions are used to publish religious literature and maintain the Philadelphia temple.

Burns is not the only airport employee unhappy about the six to eight Krishna devotees on the concourses daily.

"They're really a pain in the uh, neck," says airport barber Frank Gi-



Philadelphia Inquirer / J. KINGSTON COLEMAN
Michele Donohue (right) and another Krishna devotee

annone, 28. "I get constant complaints. I've seen them give their books to people, get a contribution that they didn't think was enough and then take the book back."

"And it's a shame what they do to servicemen. They concentrate on them. Yeh, they really nail the servicemen."

"The (Krishna) women always say 'It's ladies' day' or 'It's gentlemen's day' and then they pin a flower on," says Gerry Parker, 31, who sells silver-dollar jewelry at the airport. "I've seen soldiers give them traveler's checks."

Most of the travelers simply ignore the devotees. Others such as Jack Bell of DeQueen, Ark., who was on his way from the airport to Atlantic City one recent day, stop for a moment.

"Yeah, he said to me, 'I'd like to

give you a book, pass it on to your friends,' and then asked me for a contribution," said Bell, who offered \$4. "I just like books."

The coming of Bicentennial crowds to the airport lights up the eyes of the Krishna followers.

"It is a great opportunity to reach hundreds of thousands of souls and help them recover their God consciousness," says Torreti.

"I hope they won't be the first impression," says Burns. "If they are, I regret it. They don't represent Philadelphia..."

"The people who say things like that are just envious of Krishna, that's all," says Miss Donohue.

After escaping the Krishna devotees, the visitor to Philadelphia heads to center city along Route 291 and the Penrose Avenue Bridge. But that's another story...