

WANNABE STARS PAY PRICE - BIG BUCKS CAN'T BUY CAREER

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Thousands of wannabe stars are forking over up to \$10,000 to attend a convention that promises a shot at the big time - and offers little in return, The Post has found.

"I want my money back!" said Amanda Belle, 16, a Chicago high-school student whose mother paid \$6,000 for her to attend the International Modeling and Talent Association's New York convention, which wrapped up at the Midtown Hilton last night.

Amanda, an aspiring actress, wasn't picked for interviews with agents.

"We paid a lot of money, and we didn't get anything," she said, wiping away her tears.

Would-be luminaries from all over the country pay from \$2,000 to \$10,000 to IMTA-affiliated talent schools - such as Barbizon and John Robert Powers - for packages that include classes and trips to the convention. The schools host talent contests, leading kids to believe they've been "highly selected" and are bound for fame - if they attend the convention.

"All of these kids go there and are convinced that they'll be the next superstar, and they come back with nothing," said Rhonda Hudson, president of the Model's Guild, a union in New York.

IMTA draws hopefuls to two conventions a year, one in Los Angeles and another in New York.

IMTA CEO George Chesteen wouldn't discuss his company's prices, and said he promises only a good time to those attending the conventions.

But the talent "directors" at IMTA-member schools promise a shot at modeling contracts - and convention-goers complained of exorbitant rates.

"It was just one lie after another to get us there," said Jeanne Megel, 49, a Colorado Springs jewelry designer who spent \$7,000 for her daughter, Katie, 16, to attend a convention.

"We should be on a beach somewhere for all this money - but we love our daughter," said Rick Parish, a Denver dad who paid \$10,000 for himself, his wife and their daughter Becky, 14, to attend.

One former IMTA employee said the Phoenix-based business offers commissions for modeling-school agents, encouraging them to bring in candidates. The schools boast agency-placement rates of up to 85 percent, she said, but once they get to IMTA, only around 10 percent meet with agents, and fewer than 2 percent sign contracts, she said.

Aspiring model Valerie Pintado, 22, flew from Puerto Rico, spending \$3,600 to try and land a contract, but the brown-eyed brunette didn't land a single meeting.

"Sometimes, they're just looking for a different look," she said with a sad shrug. "At least I got to see New York."