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You may get lucky at annual event

"You've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do ya, punk?"

If you find yourself posing that infamous "Dirty Harry" movie quote in Manchester this week, chances are you'll hear hundreds of people shouting, "Yes!" The 20th annual National Sweepstakes Convention is setting up shop at the Center of New Hampshire Radisson Hotel from Wednesday through Sunday.

Contest hobbyists are touching down at Manchester Boston Regional Airport, clutching rabbit's feet, horseshoes, feng shui bric-a-brac and copies of the book "The Secret." Contesters will exchange stories of winning everything from trips to Greece to free music downloads on the Internet. The hardcore players are invading New Hampshire.

Scoring free stuff is fun. I remember winning a new customer subscription contest on my paper route as a kid. My prize? A brand new four-track (not eight-track) tape player and music cartridges by Herman's Hermits and Eric Burdon and the Animals. Then, I fell just two new subscribers short of winning a trip to Washington, D.C. Several years ago, I won a vacation to Hawaii worth about \$9,000. I took the cash equivalent instead, which after taxes, was about half that amount. I understand the thrill of the kill. So does Canada's self-proclaimed contest queen, Carolyn Wilman.

The Ontario mom and entrepreneur has won almost everything except a Grammy and the World Series. Just give her time. She spends up to two hours a day entering as many sweepstakes as she can. Her prizes? Forget Herman's Hermits tapes. She got to meet Sting. Plus, she's won trips that included a vacation to England, where she visited the set of a "Harry Potter" movie. To prove it, she has pictures of herself sitting in Dumbledore's chair.

Wilman has built an empire out of teaching contest players the secrets of her winning ways and even brought sweepstakes conventions to Canada. If you run into her in the elevators at the Radisson, you might accidentally brush up against her in hopes that her winning ways might rub off. "Oh, excuse me, ma'am, I was reaching for the button for the eighth floor when I accidentally bumped your elbow. Whoa! Is that a \$20 bill on the floor?"

If you don't run into Wilman in the hotel elevator or powder room during the convention, dozens of contesting vendors will be happy to help to help you raise your winning mojo.

Several vendors will sell you special entry envelopes they claim will catch the attention of judges in some contests. Information sessions will no doubt teach convention-goers how to use Internet software to enter online contests thousands of times with a computer keystroke.

I'm actually glad that computer programs are replacing rabbit's feet for luck. I think rabbits are feeling good about that, too. Plus, rubbing lucky people in elevators could get you arrested.

As I scan the convention agenda, one topic is conspicuous by its absence: "How to get lucky finding a good parking spot on Elm Street in front of the Radisson."

Hear Mike Morin weekdays from 5-10 a.m. on "New Hampshire in the Morning" on 95.7 WZID. Contact him at Heymikey@aol.com.