

Clairvoyance his guide

Man drives blindfolded

United Press International
CHICAGO — The long, sleek, silver 1979 Cadillac Eldorado cruised up North Michigan Avenue and other drivers gaped in shocked surprise.

Behind the wheel of the Cadillac was a man wearing a black hood and a cotton and steel blindfold. In the passenger seats were Dracula and his bride, Vampira, and three nervous reporters.

Drive for more than three miles from the John Hancock Center to the Century Shopping Center.

The ride on Friday the 13th was a promotion for the March of Dimes Foundation. Driving the Cadillac was Alphonse F. Curatola, 42, an architect with offices in the John Hancock Center.

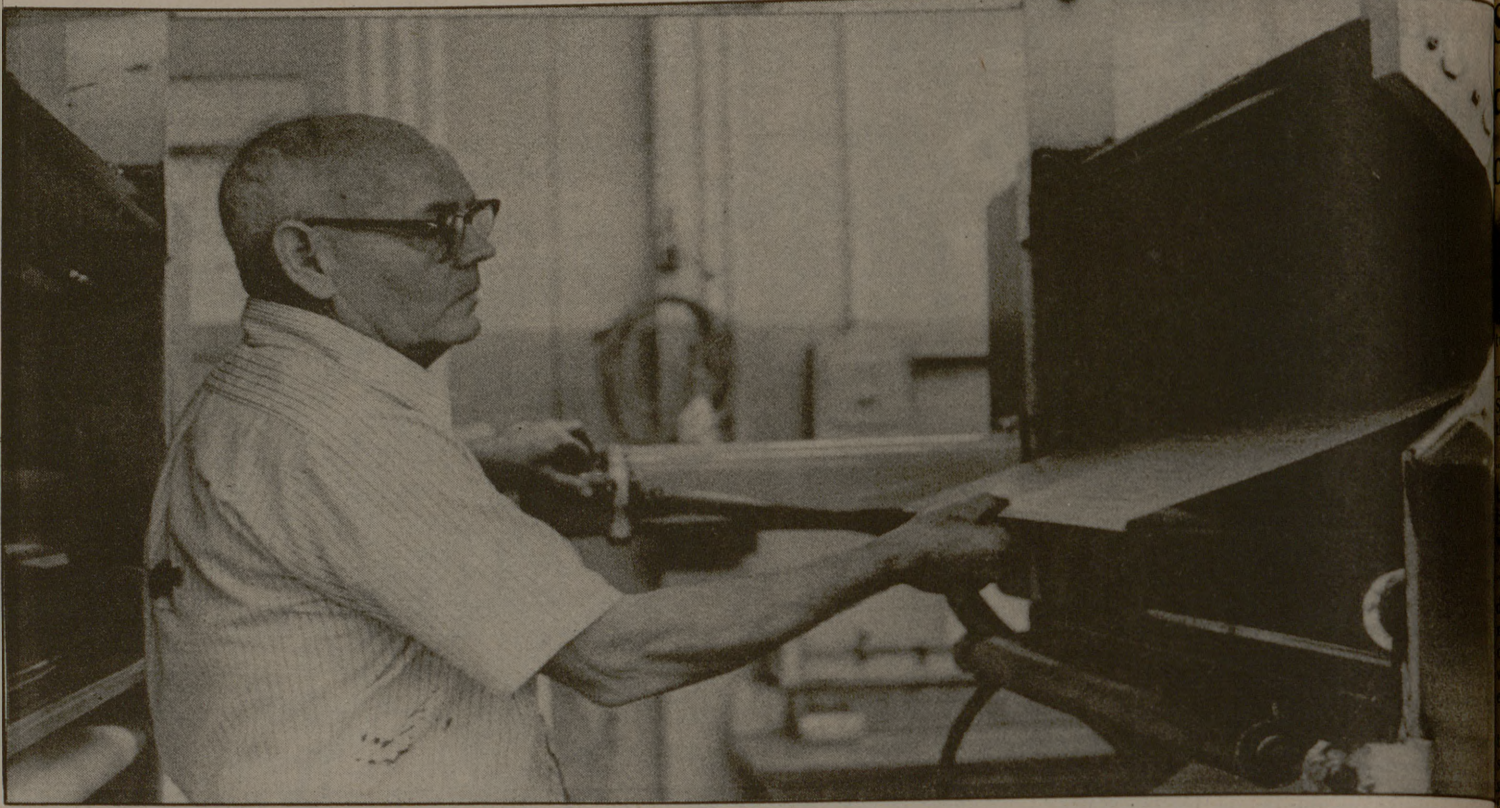
He drove the car blindfolded to the foundation's Halloween haunted house at the shopping center.

Curatola said he made the drive by what he called his "clairvoyance," which he said allows him to detect and "see" objects hidden from his sight. He hopes to have his blind drive put in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Before the ride began, his passengers were nervous when Curatola had to be led to the driver's door of his car parked outside the Hancock. He opened all the windows and the sunroof of the car, then got onto the busy highway.

He had no "close calls" with other cars during the trek and no police escort was set up to clear traffic, although he occasionally asked to be directed by the reporters. At one point, when a cab driver blasted his horn at the Cadillac, Curatola yelled, "Can't you see where you're going?"

Curatola said he's been practicing driving blindfolded for 15 years. He once drove a shorter distance blindfolded in Los Angeles, he said.



A pressing process — The Battalion

Pressman Bob Evins prepares one of the presses in the Texas A&M Printing Center to run the day's Battalion. The aluminum plate he is holding does not touch the paper. Instead, it picks up ink and transfers it to the cylindrical rubber

blanket that actually prints on the paper. Each day about 22,000 copies of the Battalion are distributed on campus around College Station.

Battalion photo by Beth Calkins

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City wants hydrogen for energy

United Press International
FOREST CITY, Iowa — This town famed for building recreational

vehicles wants to use nature's most abundant element and an underutilized state resource to combat soaring fuel bills.

The potential energy source is hydrogen, nature's simplest element. The resource is Iowa coal, which has a sulfur content too high to make it acceptable for burning within state and federal air pollution standards.

Through a novel process yet untested on a large scale, the northern Iowa town of 3,800 residents hopes to use the coal to produce hydrogen gas that in turn can be used to heat homes and factories and run the municipal power plant.

"We're really excited about this," said Douglas Eddy, president of the Forest City Industrial Development Group. "We're looking at the possibility of an unlimited source of energy and one that doesn't pollute. That's pretty exciting when you think about it."

To produce hydrogen, a process known as coal gasification is used. Although there are huge gasification plants costing upwards of \$1 billion at several sites around the world, most produce coal gas and not hydrogen, which has not been regarded as a viable primary fuel.

Development of a hydrogen-based fuel economy was proposed by John K. Hanson, founder of Winnebago Industries, the city's largest employer and one of the nation's largest manufacturers of recreational vehicles.

Hanson began shopping for alternate energy systems after Winnebago's annual fuel bill jumped from \$250,000 in 1972, the year before the Arab oil embargo, to \$2 million last year. His search took him to Billings Energy Corporation in Utah, which has experimented with hydrogen for several years.

The firm has successfully retrofitted a Winnebago motor home and a prototype residential energy system with hydrogen power plants. To add greater flexibility to hydrogen's use, Billings scientists have developed a storage system that uses an iron-titanium compound to literally soak up the hydrogen gas, then release it as it is needed.

With a \$50,000 grant from Hanson, Billings began looking at Winnebago's energy needs. The project since has mushroomed into a blueprint for revolutionizing the way Forest City and Winnebago meet their energy needs.

With a \$20 million coal gasifica-

tion plant, city officials estimate they could supply enough hydrogen to cut Winnebago's fuel bills by 50 percent. The city's electrical generation plant and cut residential gas consumption by injecting the gas under the natural gas system.

"Hydrogen is the only fuel that can be used to run your car, your home or power a general plant and since it's contained in coal, there's no risk of running out of it," said Barrie Campbell, vice president for research.

Campbell downplayed the town's possible dangers. He said critics have been eager to point to the explosion of a German zeppelin Hindenburg in 1937 — which used lighter-than-hydrogen for buoyancy — as evidence of hydrogen's volatility.

He said it is as safe, if not safer, than natural gas or propane. The main attraction in the Forest City case, Campbell said, is the city's energy needs.

Researchers also expect the community could recover \$800,000 a year by selling the products of the coal gasification process, including sulfur for fertilizer.

The hydrogen project has gotten off the drawing board. The Iowa Legislature was asked to put up \$165,000 for a study of the Forest City system. The money is made available, officials said they can raise the million needed for plant construction.

But Forest City is banking on the future of its hydrogen-based economy and already is using prospects of low-priced and available fuel to lure industry north central Iowa.

Eddy said one East Coast manufacturer expressed an interest in relocating a \$5 million plant in Forest City to escape skyrocketing costs and interruptions in its energy-intensive manufacturing process.

If the city is successful in building a plant that works, Eddy Campbell predicted other projects will follow suit.

"When you're taking a chance, there's always the possibility the answer will be 'no, you can't do it,'" Eddy said.

"But if it does work, Forest City the state — everyone stands to benefit."

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