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World

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Strange

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Jobs

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Dan Collins: A look into the fast-pased world of speed dating

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Dan Collins, The Examiner

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BALTIMORE - If there's one thing we Americans like, it's variety. And whatever else we may like, we like it FAST. Our messages, coffee and gratification better be instant.

Couple these two fun facts with another — there are nearly 96 million singles in this country, according to a 2004 report from the U.S. Census Bureau — and you've got a nation that's ripe for speed dating.

You walk into a room (in my case, the Babalu Grill), meet 10 to 12 strangers of the opposite sex, chat each up for 6 minutes, go home and check a Web site to see if anyone you met was entranced enough by your Adidas Sport cologne to chat with you again.

I had the speed-dating experience several years ago with another service at the Inner Harbor Hard Rock Café (loud distracting music, bad lighting and lots of alcohol definitely facilitate these events) and found my evening courtesy of the folks at Cupid.com/PreDating to be about the same, but with subtle differences.

With Pre-Dating, you are identified by first name only, and are allotted 6 minutes per "pre-date" (I liked to think of it as a kind of mini job-interview. ... What's your sign? Come here often? What are your strengths and weaknesses, and where do you see yourself in five years?).

"Six minutes seems to be the perfect amount of time to determine if this someone I'd want to go with on a date," said Jaynie Beard, an event coordinator for Cupid.com/Pre-Dating who has split her time bringing people together in Baltimore and Harrisburg, Pa., for three years.

All the participants had a pretty positive attitude about the whole affair.

“I haven’t had anything crazy happen” at any of the speed dating events, Beard notes, though occasionally there’s a 50-something guy trying to break ranks into the younger age brackets, which is one way “to really piss off a 35-year-old girl.”

And then there are those with less than realistic expectations.

“Some people are inpatient. They come to one event and expect to meet their soul mate and then get very disappointed when they don’t. Those who have success are those who go to several events.

“You can bring people together in a facilitated manner like we do, but it’s still a matter of timing, being in the right place at the right time to find someone for you,” Beard said.

And as my timing is less than perfect — it’s clear I must return to speed dating once again.

A Baltimore native, Dan Collins is a 43-year-old single, public relations professional.
Examiner

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