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 Friday, July 7, 2006
Face to Face for 6 Minutes

Some people don't have time for first dates that might be boring

BY RAY GLASS
AVALANCHE-JOURNAL

Darryl was about to meet face to face with several women, all strangers who, like himself, were single thirtysomethings hoping to find new friends and, just possibly, eventually serious relationships.

But the Lubbock businessman was neither scared nor nervous. Instead, he was optimistic and curious on the eve of his foray into the world of Lubbock speed dating.

"You don't really know what to expect, but you're excited by the idea of meeting new people," the 39-year-old said. "Whether it turns into a romance or anything like that, you don't know going into it. Ultimately, you hope maybe to find a dating partner. But it's just a good opportunity

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to bring folks under one roof for a very casual meeting. If something develops from that, to me that's a bonus."



Joe Don Buckner / Staff

Darryl, a Lubbock business professional, has utilized Cupid.com/PreDating services in order to connect with single women in the area on a loose, fast basis.

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Darryl, a lifelong Lubbock resident who owns an import business, is among a small but growing number of South Plains residents who have participated in local sessions sponsored by Cupid.com / PreDating, which is billed as a national speed dating service for busy, single professionals.

The Cupid.com sessions, as well as those staged by other national speed dating services, bring together an even number of

single women and men for a series of brief meetings that may lead to relationships.

Participants typically use only first names in these sessions, and The Avalanche-Journal agreed to follow that practice in interviews for this story.

Christy, 36, was a newcomer to Lubbock when she participated this spring in a Cupid.com session at a local restaurant.

"I thought it would be a good way to meet people," said Christy, who is in leasing management. "I guess in the beginning, all of us were a little nervous because we didn't know what to expect. We all got in there and realized we were in the same boat, so everybody loosened up, and we had a great time."

Speed dating is popular worldwide, according to the Web site www.speeddatingsites.com, with hundreds of companies using various formats to provide an ice-breaking option to relationships.

"I think singles are tired of long, boring first dates," said Noelle Schmidt, vice

Speed dating

Upcoming speed dating events arranged by Cupid.com/PreDating:

Monday - 7 p.m., 101 Grill & Bar, 10007 Slide Road. Women ages 26-34, men ages 28-36.

Aug. 24 - 7 p.m., 101 Grill & Bar. Women and men ages 45-60.

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president of operations for Cupid.com. "We know that chemistry occurs in the first few minutes of meeting someone, and in speed dating you meet up to 12 singles, maybe more."

Cupid.com/PreDating averages nearly 300 events each month nationwide involving about 2,500 single adults, Schmidt said. Local events have been held in May and June, and regional coordinator Joy Lane plans to stage one Lubbock event each month.

Events are typically held in public settings such as restaurants. Participants register online and are grouped by age. When they arrive, they receive badges with their first name and a number. Each woman is seated at her own table, and men rotate to each table during the evening for six-minute visits.

"Six minutes seems too short when you really click with someone and not too agonizingly long when you don't," 35-year-old Mindy said.

A ringing bell signals the end of each six-minute period. Participants rate each other by selecting either "let's talk again" or "no thanks" on their individual match sheet. Participants give the results at the end of the evening to an event coordinator, who posts them online within 24 hours and indicates matches - participants who both selected "let's talk again" after their six-minute session with each other.

Speed dating is designed to facilitate face-to-face meetings yet maintain privacy. Cupid.com/PreDating provides an online link for additional contact, but participants must choose to disclose any more information about themselves or arrange further meetings.

Darryl, Christy and Mindy have all exchanged e-mails and become friends with people they met through speed dating. Mindy, a professional at a university, said one of her speed-dating relationships has progressed to the dating stage.

"The way it's set up, there's no way for anyone to find out anything about you unless you personally give them the information," Mindy said. "That's very comforting, as well as reassuring."

Darryl said he first heard about speed dating from a friend and through it has been able to meet people despite his hectic, busy schedule.

"It's challenging in Lubbock meeting people," he said. "You've got the bar scene, you've got the church scene, and you don't have a whole lot of things in between."

Christy and Mindy both say they have accomplished their goal of making new friends.

33-45, men ages 34-47.

Cost is \$35, and participants must register online at www.cupid.com.

Contact Lubbock/ Amarillo event coordinator Joy Lane at (806) 679-8440 for more information.



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"It's one of the most enjoyable things I've ever done, and it's totally out of character for me in a sense," Mindy said. "I am really very shy in social settings. I never would have believed I'd be doing something like speed dating."

Because first impressions are crucial in speed dating, opening lines can be pivotal in the process. Darryl prefers a simple approach, such as, "What do you like to do?"

"I don't think you really have to try and impress somebody right off the bat," he said. "You just want to let them know that you're warm, outgoing and interested in them. Make good eye contact and let things take their course."

But Christy would like to hear more of variety among the initial questions.

"Nearly every single guy sat down and asked me, 'So what do you do?' " she said. "My advice is prepare a different question."

Speed dating is more to the point than meeting someone through work, a club or another group, Mindy said.

"Everyone is there to meet someone," she said. "There are no illusions. Having just six minutes to visit with someone makes you realize what's really important to you, and you can generally tell what's important to the other person."

To comment on this story:

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