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Cupid deserves more respect

By [William Loeffler](#)

TRIBUNE-REVIEW
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Love is now publicly traded.

Both Match.com and Yahoo, two of the biggest dating Web sites, are listed on the NASDAQ.

What is not listed are the online makeovers that some singles give themselves when advertising their dating desirability. They shave years off their age, add inches to their height or, in the case of a guy courting Erin Schultz of Ross, give themselves a job that doesn't exist.

Schultz, 26, met the guy online at Friendster.com. She says he told her he worked in the admissions department at the University of Pittsburgh.

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"He had a photo of him sitting in his office," she says.

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friends, family and co-workers -- who know your likes and dislikes.

"Your friends are a good filter," Schultz says.

The cupid filter would likely have weeded out the guy Kelly Altares of Mt. Lebanon met on Match.com. He didn't post a photo of himself on the Web site, but she decided to give him a chance anyway. They made a date for sushi at Station Square.

"He had told me that he was approximately 5 foot 8 inches and had brown curly hair," says Altares, 43. "And was in his early 30s."

When they met, he had aged at least a couple of decades.

"He had to be pushing 60. He was about 5 foot 4 inches. He was carrying a dozen red roses. He was legally blind."

Not only that, but he demanded she give him a ride home after the date. When she politely refused, she says, "he turned into this 12-year-old nasty boy."

Online vs. the fix-up

Altares, who figures she's been on 40 blind dates, many set up by a married female friend, doesn't necessarily favor blind dating over the point-and-click version.

"I don't know that one's better than the other," she says. "I've had equal disappointments and equally pleasant outcomes from both. Whether I'm meeting you because I found you on the Internet or meeting

The guy couldn't have known that she had friends in the very office where he claimed to be drawing a paycheck. She checked. They'd never heard of him.

"I was kind of excited because he seemed normal," says Schultz, who now is in a relationship with someone else.

For singles who are weary of the self-serve approach of online dating, where people can exaggerate and flat-out lie, blind dates can provide a reasonable alternative. After all, blind dates really aren't completely sight unseen. Potential suitors usually are screened by your personal cupids --

you because somebody thought we would be a good match for each other, it doesn't really matter to me."

Bill Cartiff, travel director for Jewish Singles for the Jewish Community Center in Squirrel Hill, is of the same mind.

"Basically, isn't an online date pretty much a blind date?" he asks.

Working in partnership with Amazing Journeys travel agency in Mt. Lebanon, Cartiff organizes between eight and 10 cruises for Jewish singles a year. In addition to singles from Pittsburgh, they get Jewish singles from Britain, South Africa, Belgium and Uruguay.

"Blind dates, fix-ups, random meetings, those never went away," says Cartiff, who lives in Churchill and is dating a woman from London he met on one of his own singles cruises. "I think people have maximized their use of JDate and Match.com. Probably in another 10 years, it will have evolved into something else or a new wave of online dating.

"I think blind dates carry an inherent risk of the unknown, because if I have a female friend who I want to fix you up with, if I say, 'She's really cute, she 's really nice,' that's my opinion. You may not find that to be true."

Online dating evolves

The second generation of online dating services have begun to incorporate selective elements of the blind date into their business strategies.

Dating industry veteran Trish McDermott assisted with the startup of Match.com in April 1995 and served as Match.com's spokesperson with the press title "Vice President of Romance." She is now chief matchmaker for Engage.com, a new San Francisco-based site that allows members' friends and family to log on and act as matchmakers. McDermott calls it "intervention dating."

As in real-life blind dating, this community oversight is intended to discourage assorted creeps and cads who lie about their income or marital status, something they can do more easily with the one-on-one relationships of other dating sites.

"There's no reputation," McDermott says of traditional online dating. "There's no support structure, which would be friends or interested colleagues and associates. On 'Engaged,' you have a reputation."

The "scientific" approach of another popular dating Web site, eHarmony, can't replace old-fashioned human intuition, she says.

"We're kind of pitting instincts and meddlesome matchmakers and intuition and butterflies in your stomach against quantitative, purportedly scientific compatibility," she says.

She cites a June 2005 Engage.com survey of more than 1,000 married adults in the United States. The couples, who are not Engage.com members, found that their marriages were more likely to have been the result of a personal introduction than through any other means, such as self introductions, online dating or chance encounters.

Cupid.com, founded in 2001, acquired Predating, the nation's largest speed-dating company, in 2004. They triangulate their online dating service with radio promotions in more than 100 local markets and coordinate speed-dating events with local PreDating representatives.

"Our view is that dating is very much a local business," says Eric Strauss, president and chief executive officer. "eHarmony is great for matching somebody up with you, but if you're in Pittsburgh and they're in L.A., what good is that?"

Predating gives couples about five minutes to chat before moving on. Participants can later log on to Cupid.com to find out whether any of their five-minute dates are interested in taking it further. They then have the option of responding with an e-mail. It's a blind date without the eternity, Strauss says.

In the traditional blind date, he says, "You go in and you shake hands with a person and you say 'Hello,' and you know within about 30 seconds whether it's going to be the biggest waste of time in your life and you've got two hours to go."

Friends and family aren't infallible, he says.

"With all due respect to my mother," Strauss says, "her choice of women and my choice of women were not always similar."

A Predate event is scheduled for Wednesday at Sing Sing piano bar at the Waterfront in Homestead. The cost is \$30. Details: Jenn@Pre-dating.com.

Blind date success stories

Mitzi Brinkman, 47, McDonald

She says her blind date was arranged through a matchmaking service called The Right Relationship, located in Cranberry.

"I didn't have any idea what he looked like at all," she says of boyfriend Mark Shannon of Bellevue. "We met under Kaufmann's clock on Saturday afternoon. He and I had probably spoken on the phone three

times before we met."

The couple have been dating for 10 months.

Edward Yoder, 74, Hempfield

Yoder met his future wife, Carolyn, in the early 1950s when he needed "a warm body" to get him through the door at the Sunnybrook Ballroom in Pottstown. He was keen to see the reunited Dorsey Brothers and their big band,

"You couldn't come alone," he says. "You had to have a date. Nobody was allowed in without a date. I was desperate. ... I called up my buddy from high school. He called his girlfriend. She called someone she knew. One thing led to another."

He admits: "She had to look me (up) in the yearbook before she would agree to go out."

Betty Rapin, 75, Penn Township

"I had three blind dates in my life and married two of them," she says. "My first one was when I was in high school. I wasn't even attracted to him at all. My second blind date I married and had three children by him. I got married right after high school."

She became a widow in 1972.

The third blind date in her life was arranged while she worked as a waitress at Churchill Valley Country Club. A female member asked Rapin if she wanted to meet her uncle. She was dating him for two months when she found out he actually was the female member's father. He also lied about his age, Rapin says.

"I kind of liked him right off the bat," she says. "He looked like Tony Curtis. A younger version of Tony Curtis."

She and husband Richard Rapin will celebrate their 30th anniversary this year.

Victor "Zeke" Clark, 74, Lower Burrell

A friend fixed him up with his future wife, Peggy, in 1951. They went to Kennywood Park.

"I was working at Allegheny Ludlum," Clark says. "We didn't hit it off too good right off the bat. It took some time. She loved dancing and I loved sports."

The couple celebrate their 53rd wedding anniversary June 6.

"It worked out for me," he says. "Best thing that ever happened to me."

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