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Desperately seeking Cupid

Attention single people: Valentine's Day is just 32 days away

Kris Thoma

@PensacolaNewsJournal.com

Have you been seeking Cupid for so long that it feels like you'll never find love?

If hearing a co-worker squeal over a bouquet of roses or listening to your best friend swoon over his new girlfriend makes you want to overdose on conversation hearts, it's time to start thinking about how you will A) avoid Valentine's Day altogether or B) land a date for Feb. 14.




If you choose Option B, the odds might be against you.



Pamela Burr, who is retired from the Air Force, thinks it might be easier if the Pensacola singles scene was more organized.

"People want to get together. There are a lot of singles here," she said.

When Burr lived in Dayton, Ohio, she was one of thousands of singles who participated in two active groups that coordinated

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Pamela Burr, Marc Yu and Mike Raab, right, chat recently during a gathering at Hub Stacey's in Pensacola. Raab is the organizer of a group that meets monthly at various locations.
BenTwingley@PensacolaNewsJournal.com

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What not to do on a first date

Matchmaking expert Janis Spindel, owner of Janis Spindel Serious Matchmaking Inc. in New York, offers this advice:

Don't bring up your ex-wife, husband, girlfriend, boyfriend, terrible divorce, swinging sex life, terrible job or any other unflattering/semi-dysfunctional aspects of your life on the first date.

Do not forget your non-negotiables when out with someone.

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regular activities.

"It was a non-threatening environment," she said. "There was no pressure."

In Pensacola, there are several groups organizing events, and Burr has tried several of them. She thinks the groups might be more successful if they worked together so that singles can quickly and easily get information about where to go and what's happening.

If you're single and looking, it may be time to think about what you need to do to meet new people on a regular basis.

Here are some tips for those seeking Cupid in the Pensacola area:

1 Do something different

According to Janis Spindel, owner of Janis Spindel Serious Matchmaking Inc. in New York, getting too comfortable in a routine is the main reason why single people stay single.

"When you stick to what you know nothing new ever happens," she said.

Starting today, get away from your routine. Join a fitness class, co-ed softball team, book club or volunteer organization. Go for a long walk around your neighborhood. Try new restaurants. Vary the times you do things. If you go to the gym every morning, try going in the afternoon one day. Try a different coffee shop.

Then, when you are at a new place, talk to people. Make eye contact. Be friendly. Don't just talk to people you are attracted to, but rather look at every conversation as an opportunity to expand your network and meet new people.

Recognize that you should not embark on a long-term relationship with someone who does not want kids when you have always dreamed of being a parent, or date a smoker when you cannot stand the smell of cigarettes. But do not close yourself off to people who have different interests.

Do not go into any date with a bad attitude. Your companion for the evening will sense it right away, and that does not make for a good time for either party.

Featured event for singles

Cokesbury United Methodist Church, which hosts regular events for single members of its congregation, is planning a citywide event for singles.

WHAT: "Winter Warmups: Friends, Food, Fellowship."

WHEN: Feb. 4 from 7 to 11 p.m.

WHERE: Asbury Place at Cokesbury United Methodist Church, 5725 N. Ninth Ave.

COST: \$5.

DETAILS: Features the Mullens Dance Band. Call Janet Westlake, 476-5818.

'Single' events

Other resources for singles:

Cultural Singles: Meets Fridays, 7 p.m. at Ragtyme Grille, 201 Jefferson St. 474-9744 or e-mail PNSsingles@hotmail.com.

Singles at Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church: Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. at Cafe 98, Community Life Center, Soundside Drive at U.S. 98. Look for balloons on a chair. There will be a group discussion following a dinner. Cost is \$6. Call Shebbie Shields at 934-1412. Singles also are welcome to attend a dinner usually on the second and fourth Fridays of each month. Cost is \$5. Call Terrie Diamond, 932-3594, to make reservations.

Solo Adults for Singles in their Middle Years: Sundays, 6:30 p.m. Asbury Place, 5725 N. Ninth Ave. Contact Janet Westlake at 476-5818 for more details.

Pensacola Singletons: 476-0618, geocities.com/pensacolasingletons, or pensacolasingletons@yahoo.com.

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"Take the hello challenge and see how many people you can talk to everyday," suggests Spindel. "You never know who you can meet."

2 Tell others you're looking

Spindel recommends telling everyone -- family, friends, co-workers -- you are looking for a relationship. By doing so, you'll have more eyes and ears out there working for you. Don't be afraid to get set up. If the match isn't right, you can always make a new friend.

Networking is just as important for singles as it is in business.

3 Seek out events

When Mike Raab moved a year ago to Pensacola from Annapolis, Md., he immediately looked on the Internet for an active singles group. He had participated in numerous events with a group in Maryland and figured it would be a good way to meet people here.

But after finding one, he soon realized that no one had stepped up to organize events for the group.

Now, he's trying to generate interest in the group -- which is geared to single professionals -- so that events eventually can be catered to age groups and specific interests. Anyone can join by going to singles.meetup.com/77.

"It's one way I've found around here to meet people without going into the bars and the meat market and that type of thing," he said. "It's nice to get out with people you can identify with. I've found that group settings are the way to go."

For other singles events, be sure to ask around at church, school or your favorite hangout for information. Check the News Journal's Weekender for ideas and contact information.

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Burr, who is a member of the Meetup group, said it's important not to get discouraged if you don't meet someone immediately. Just think of it as a way to expand your network and make friends, then go from there, she said.

4 Don't be afraid to flirt

Flirting is an important thing for singles to master.

Jill Spiegel, author of "The Flirtologist's Guide to Dating," believes flirting is the key to connecting with people in a meaningful way.

She advises smiling, making eye contact and talking to people you encounter as if you already know them.

"Realize that whenever you are around people, there are opportunities," she said. "Practice being friendly whenever you are around people."

The result is that you will attract people who are warm and genuine. It may not always lead to a romantic relationship, but it opens doors.

"The top three qualities that people are looking for are warmth, genuineness and empathy," Spiegel said. "Exude those qualities, and that will draw people to you."

5 Try speed dating

The concept of meeting 10 or more people in one night gained worldwide popularity several years ago when it first arrived in larger cities.

It's based on the concept that chemistry between two people occurs within the first few minutes of meeting.

Marc Yu plans to try it out for the first time on Feb. 8 when

Cupid.com will host two sessions at Zea on Gregory Street.

"I'm not sure what to expect," said Yu, who resides in Crestview but seeks out opportunities for singles in the Pensacola area.

"Hopefully I'll meet some people, but I don't have extremely high expectations. But who knows? I might be surprised."

Cupid.com calls its event "PreDating." Yu will have the opportunity to meet up to 12 women in his age range, something he said he has a hard time doing on his own. Each "date" last six minutes.

Details: visit www.Cupid.com/PreDating.

6 Consider the Internet

From Match.com with more than 8 million members to numerous smaller online dating sites, more people than ever are logging on and attempting to find love through the Internet.

Kay Fox, owner of Green Fox Health Foods store, hears all kinds of stories from her customers who are dating online. When she decided to try it out for herself, she explored numerous sites to find one that best suited her needs.

After meeting someone, she always spends at least four to six weeks talking with them online before even considering meeting in person.

"I would never meet anyone unless you've communicated that long," she said.

Plus, "you can find out a tremendous amount about someone by their e-mailing," she said. "If they can't even capitalize or spell, then maybe they aren't what you are looking for."

She recommends being yourself, being honest and posting several up-to-date pictures. When you do decide to meet, pick

a neutral place and drive yourself there. For your safety, don't give them an address or your last name, she said.

7 Host a singles party

Even if you are single, playing matchmaker for your friends can be quite fun and a way for you to meet people, too.

Fox said a friend of hers threw a party for singles one summer, and it was so successful, it became a yearly tradition. She asked her single female friends to bring a single male with whom they were not involved.

"The women were told to bring enough food for two and the men were told to bring wine or beer," Fox said. "There was nothing to it."

Think about the single women or men you know -- at work, the gym, school, church or the coffee shop. Build your guest list from there.

8 Find the right mindset

"Make a list of the inner qualities that you are looking for, then be those qualities," said Spiegel, the flirting guru. "Get clear on the type of person you're looking for, then gravitate to the environment where that type of person would be."



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