



"Your Direct Line To Qualified Personnel"

Orange County
Middletown, NY
845-344-3434

Dutchess County
Wappingers Falls, NY
845-298-1116

Sullivan County
Monticello, NY
845-794-3434

www.hereshelp.com

recordonline.com

from the **TIMES HERALD-RECORD**

[Customer Service](#) | [Subscribe](#)

CLASSIFIEDS JOBS CARS HOMES SPECIAL PUB. COUPONS

Home
News
Obituaries
Weather
Columnists
National News
Online Chats
Sports
Business
Go Online
Opinion
Community
Multimedia Features
Archives
Customer Service
Web Feeds RSS
Headline Email
Advertise
Contact Us
Site Map
Search Archives

February 12, 2006

Hit men (and women) for love

Finding romance in the Catskills and Hudson Valley can be daunting

By Alexa James and Ramsey Al-Rikabi

Message Board: [Where do you go to meet others in the Hudson Valley or Catskill region?](#)

IT AIN'T NO "SEX AND THE CITY," FOLKS. In layman's terms, the mid-Hudson dating scene is gloomy. Our landscape is vast. The people spread out. Singles roam aimlessly, hunting for another of their kind. Someone to shop with, cook for, maybe make and raise a baby with. But gloominess is relative.

The geographic gripe

Let's start in Orange County. For the young and reckless on Newburgh's much-celebrated waterfront, bars like Front Street and Gullies are fine meat markets. But don't confuse nightlife with love; what most do there couldn't be called "dating."

"Every 25-year-old guy hits on my mom, and every 45-year-old guy hits on me," says Lindsay Hammer.

Sitting across from the 24-year-old Montgomery native one recent evening at the Ward's Bridge Inn, bemoaning the single life, is Eric Hipsman. Also 24, he lives in Port Jervis, which, to him, is sadder than Newburgh.

"There is nobody in Port Jervis," he says.

Lindsay rolls her eyes.

He insists. "There really isn't."

In Ulster, you hear it again: "There's nobody good in this area," says Vanessa Barahona of Plattekill. "I'm moving."

If you think you're looking for love in all the wrong places, maybe you're right.

In the Hudson Valley, we spend a lot of time commuting to long stressful days at jobs that help us afford to live here. This means a lot of alone time on the train, in the drive-through, in the cubicle or in the shop. When loneliness eventually sets in, as it can in the gray winter months, we look for familiar friends: high school alums, college classmates, the girl next door. We're too exhausted, it seems, to meet new people.

But head to Wurtsboro, in Sullivan County. For Phil Stewart, cutting chicken for a Caesar salad in the Danny's Village Inn kitchen, Orange County and environs look like the Promised Land. "Everybody goes to Middletown or Poughkeepsie or Newburgh," Stewart says, "where civilization exists."

- [E-mail story](#)
- [Print story](#)
- [Subscribe!](#)

Top Local News

- [Cops and residents establish a rapport](#)
- [County sewage plant could boost capacity](#)
- [Council waves red lantern at rail trash plan](#)
- [Liberty mold problem not severe, experts say](#)
- [Raceway, drivers OK arbitration](#)

[>> Today's stories](#)

Featured Content

- [Remembering the fallen](#)

A tribute to the local soldiers we have lost.

- [Casino Watch](#)

Continuing coverage of the casino developments in the Catskills.

- [The death of Lt. Louis Allen](#)

Story archive and complete coverage of the death of Louis Allen.

[Daily E-mail Headlines](#)



[Advanced Search](#)

SEARCH[HV.com](http://www.hv.com)

Stewart, a Sullivan County sheriff's deputy when not cooking here, met his last girlfriend at the restaurant job. The girlfriend before that was his neighbor.

"It's sucks for a guy like myself, 22 and single," in Sullivan, he says. "There's really nowhere to go, you know?"

But farther still up Route 17, past Monticello, into South Fallsburg, Ron Abner's got it bad. Forty and divorced, he's not only a subscriber to the grass-is-greener creed – "Middletown to Monticello is night and day" – Abner also has what he calls "a problem."

See, he's a nice guy and says he has a master's in literature from SUNY Binghamton and he's looking for a smart woman. But Abner runs Vegas Gold, the only strip club in Fallsburg, and that doesn't turn the ladies on. And, he says, he won't date strippers.

"It might be that I'm paranoid," Abner says. "I'm kind of trained to think no one would be accepting of it."

He tells women, when he can meet them in Newburgh or Middletown, that he's a writer. He made it through dinner once with that line. Told someone else the truth on the third date, and that ended it.

"Maybe I'm destined to be single until I get out of this business," he says behind a bar that doesn't serve alcohol because the girls don't wear clothes.

Oh, and those two dancers in the back?

Both married.

So how do you meet singles around here?

The same way more and more people shop, bank and book plane tickets – on the Internet.

Click here often?

"I always said I would never, ever, ever try Internet dating," says Michael Doucette.

Why should he?

The guy's a catch. At 28, he's a full-time professor at SUNY Orange in Middletown, coaches baseball and women's volleyball and just bought a condo in Newburgh. Life's good. Now he wants someone to share it with.

But besides nearby bars, Doucette doesn't know where to look. His colleagues are too old. His coeds are too young. And he doesn't want to be the creep sidling up to a cute lass in the produce aisle, complementing her melons.

"A couple weeks ago, I finally broke down," he says. He heard a radio plug for HudsonValley.Cupid.com and decided to take the plunge. Doucette joined more than 32,200 local online singles – men and women looking for Jane or John Right through Cupid's matching system.

"Everything in life is a numbers game," says Eric Strauss, Cupid President, CEO and founder, from his Poughkeepsie headquarters. "College applications, job applications – people make the mistake of not approaching dating the same way."

What was an uncharted universe a decade ago has quickly exploded into an \$560 million-a-year industry, says Mark Brooks, editor of Onlinepersonalswatch.com.

Have the top headlines from the Times Herald-Record e-mailed to you every morning. [Sign up here.](#)

News Tips

Have a tip about a news story? Contact THR Managing Editor Meg McGuire at mmcguire@th-record.com or call 346-3041



Match.com, eHarmony, Adam4Adam: Brooks says there are more than 800 dating sites. Cupid ranks in the top 15.

“Our niche is localization,” says Strauss. “The Hudson Valley is not known as a singles hotbed. You’ve got to push. People want fate to take care of it, but you have to be aggressive.”

Edwin Leon, 36, of Middletown, met his now-ex-wife online. When he emigrated from Ecuador in 2003, he found it difficult to meet women who shared his values and enjoyed the same hobbies: religion, education, theme parks and Dan Brown books. “Those are things that are very important at the end of the day,” he says.

Although the marriage eventually fell apart, Leon says he has no regrets and is giving online dating another go.

Doucette is still skeptical. “I feel kind of embarrassed,” he says. “I end up talking to four or five people at the same time, and I don’t know if I’m comfortable with that.” The cyber scene makes him feel like a bachelor on a reality TV series, like he’s test-dating a harem.

“The women probably feel the same way,” he says, but it still beats approaching strangers at the bar, gym or bookstore. And in today’s cell-phone saturated social schematic, cyberspace might be the most user-friendly dating frontier.

Freak or flirt?

Back Ward’s Bridge Inn, Eric and Lindsay are still talking. Eric can’t stomach that look in a female’s eyes – the deer-in-the-headlights stare a woman gets when she’s being hit on against her wishes. “You definitely don’t want to be that guy,” says the Port Jervis native who runs Mountainview Mustang in Sparrowbush and coaches track at Middletown High School.

“It’s not you,” explains Lindsay, a girls’ track coach. “Girls are always on the defense.”
And therein lies the problem.

So Lindsay and Eric decide to experiment. They will meet on Saturday night at the new Barnes & Noble in Newburgh. Eric will hit on women. Lindsay will hit on men. The idea: Test Eric’s theory that more women should make the first move to circumvent the female panic button.

They both circle the store, trolling for possibilities. Eric spots a pretty brunette in a St. John’s tennis sweatshirt. He closes in, says excuse him, but he’s looking for a book for his sister and has no clue what to get. Can she help?

She does, but her friends swoop in and usher her off.

Game, set, match.

Meanwhile, in the magazine section, Lindsay has cornered a guy in a Boston Red Sox cap. How? By asking him what the hell a Beantown boy is doing in the Mid-Hudson.

He’s going to school at Mount Saint Mary, Lindsay’s alma mater. In minutes, she’s entertaining not one, but five undergrads.

They talk about the “sucky” social scene around here. The students confess they’ve gone to Barnes & Noble on Saturday nights before. They even entered a store Scrabble tournament. Mr. Boston gives Lindsay his digits and puts hers in his cell.

Eric decides to try again. This time he goes for someone a little older; uses the same tactic. They hit it off. He’s beaming. They’re browsing.

Then another man shows up, puts his arm around Eric's love interest. "Meet my husband," she says.

Before security catches on, Lindsay and Eric flee the bookstore and head to the Super Stop & Shop on Route 300.

Should Eric put some Axe body spray in his red plastic basket? Maybe then, supermarket supermodels will start rubbing against him like cats, the way they do in the cologne commercials?

Lindsay and Eric decide there's no one in the grocery store they'd like to bag, so they move on to their third and final stop: the brand-spankin'-new TGI Friday's in Newburgh.

Inside, Lindsay orders a cocktail that looks like a fishbowl of food coloring. It's busy, but most customers arrive already coupled-up, and those who aren't sit in the dining room.

"See?" Eric tells Lindsay, "This is a battle I cannot win."

By the end of the night, the two friends settle in at the bar, flirting. With each other.

Dating like rabbits

I don't need to know your last name, or where you live or even what you do.

Just give me six minutes. When it's over, check yes if it was good for you. No, if you never want to see me again.

This is speed dating. A roomful of singles play musical chairs, checking each other out and making small talk for timed sessions. They track their impressions on private scorecards, and if a pair checks yes to one another, the event organizers help them get in touch.

Last Wednesday, Cupid.com/PreDating hosted the world's largest speed-dating event. Across the country, an estimated 4,800 singles went on more than 43,200 six-minute dates in nearly 100 cities.

"Everybody's starting at the same place," says Vicki Weed, event coordinator for the shindig at CB Driscolls in Newburgh. "We all know that we want to meet someone, whether it's to chat, to eat, to go to the movies. Maybe you just want someone to travel with."

The beauty is in the date's predetermined beginning and ending. It eliminates the stress of meeting at a restaurant or the car ride to or from. The good night kiss is impossible. You're not even supposed to ask for last names or swap business cards, and you don't have to tell one another if you even want to do it again sometime.

You decide that in private, and, if there's a consensus, with your permission, your online dating service will reveal your identity.

"It's instant gratification," says Mark Brooks, editor of Onlinepersonalswatch.com and the keynote speaker at this year's Internet Dating Conference in Miami. "It's the inverse of online dating."

And it's economical – a dozen blind dates for less than \$40. You can rate a person's clothes, teeth, hair and voice – all the superficial stuff that really matters, before you invest your time on the keyboard or in a movie theater.

The city is sexier

It is our blessing and our curse, this thing we call The City. We go there, we check it out, we dig it, we go home. Maybe we lived there for a bit. And it always comes up: It would be easier to meet someone in Manhattan, right?

"If you talk to someone in the city, they say the same thing," says Frayda Kafka, an Ulster County-based singles coach and therapist. "People in the Hudson Valley, they say the same thing. It's hard to meet people wherever you are.

"I tell people to stop feeling like victims of their community or wherever they are and focus on their strengths," Kafka says.

OK. Sound advice.

But there is a simple numbers difference. Manhattan has a lot more people, a lot more of those are single, in a lot less space.

Imagine this: Take everyone older than 15 years old in Orange, Sullivan and Ulster counties.

That is 460,186 people spread out over 2,912 square miles. Then squeeze them into the 25-square-mile Town of Chester, roughly the same size as the island of Manhattan.

Now that might increase your chances of running into a good catch, no?

It's still nowhere close to Manhattan. To get that kind of nice-to-meet-you density, multiply the new "sexy Chester" population by three.

And we're not just talking more people, but a higher concentration of singles. Around here, 27 percent of people older than 15 have never married. (We're not perverts. The U.S. Census Bureau starts its stats at 15.) That's about equal to the U.S. average. But in Manhattan, that figure jumps to 45 percent.

Still, crowded or not, Kafka insists:

"If you're the kind of person who is successful at meeting people, you'll be successful wherever you are."

Top 10 tips for finding love here

Everyone knows there are no easy answers or quick fixes to this dating in the Hudson Valley conundrum, but we'll throw a few tips at you anyway. Oh, and don't miss next week, when Record reporters Alexa James and Ramsey Al-Rikabi solve the meaning of life. Thanks for your time. Call us. (Wink, wink.)

10. Get a hobby that gets you out of the house: singles hikes, art workshops, dance lessons, cooking classes.

9. Sit at the bar instead of a booth at the diner or stand in line at McDonald's instead of hitting the drive-through. Maybe you'll get a phone number to go.

8. Pray. Churches, synagogues and mosques are great places to build up a rapport with other God-fearing singles.

7. Pose as a journalist. Buy one of those long, white notebooks and a cheap pack of pens. Use the reporter disguise to approach good-looking strangers and ask them personal questions. (Don't forget to double-check name spellings.)

6. Grunt and pant and sweat ... at the gym. Some clubs host evening social events, so you can scope out the candidates during your cardio but approach them later, when your pits don't smell like onions.

5. Watch your back, even online. Sure it's fun to surf singles from the safety of your computer chair, but that broad who looks kind of crazy online – she probably is. Don't encourage her.

4. Volunteer. Animal shelters, ambulance corps and fire departments are always looking for volunteers. C'mon baby light my fire. Then give me mouth to mouth.

3. While you're at the animal shelter, adopt a puppy, a fuzzy one. Dress it in a sweater and take it everywhere with you.

2. Read. The bookstore shelves are lined with constructive how-to titles such as "Stop Getting Dumped! All You Need to Know to Make Men Fall Madly in Love with You and Marry 'The One' in 3 Years or Less" by Lisa Daly; or "Exorcising Your Ex: How to Get Rid of the Demons of Relationships Past" by Elizabeth Kuster.

1. Move.

Alexa James and Ramsey Al-Rikabi are reporters for the Times Herald-Record. They can be reached at ajames@th-record.com and ralrikabi@th-record.com.

[Top](#)

**Record Online is brought to you by the Times Herald-Record,
serving New York's Hudson Valley and the Catskills.**

[Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Copyright](#) | [Corrections](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [Advertise](#) | [THR services](#) | [Contact](#)

© Orange County Publications. All rights reserved.