



Amy Wyatt dings a bell to signal the end of an eight-minute dating session at the Full Moon Cafe.

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# Match game

## Three new dating services start operating in Tulsa

By LEIGH WOOSLEY  
World Scene Writer

**K**ameran Ritzhaupt was a difficult woman to get a hold of.

It seemed like she was either on the phone, in a meeting or somehow tied up with her business, It's Just Lunch, a national dating service that recently opened up shop here.

Ritzhaupt owns the local franchise, and said business is so good in Tulsa that she's planning to open another It's Just Lunch in Oklahoma City some time in August.

The matchmaking company, which has spread to 80 locations, including a few international ones, is based on the theory that being set up with someone for lunch isn't the pressure cooker that a real "date" can be.

It's Just Lunch matches two singletons based on their similar interests and desires, and then schedules the "meeting," which is lunch at a local restaurant or drinks at happy hour.

"Every day we're signing up more people," Ritzhaupt said. "I don't know what it is. Our phones have been ringing off the hooks. . . . We've been swamped lately, and that's great."

Hence her unavailability, which also applies to her personal life.

Ritzhaupt, who's 28 years old, has been married more than three years, but that doesn't stop her from following the many business-minded people who are taking advantage of the nation's blossoming dating industry, which is estimated as generating a staggering \$1.5 billion.

What's driving this boom is a simple case of supply and demand. The population of single Americans already has grown to 95.7 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The trend isn't likely to slow down as the divorce rate is almost 50 percent and people are waiting longer than ever to get married.

The majority of households in Tulsa (almost 57 percent) — and 300 other U.S. cities — are maintained by single men and women, said Tom Coleman, executive director of Unmarried America, an information service on singles.

That considered, he said: "Obviously Tulsa is a potential market for dating services."

Coleman's not the only one to notice. Two speed-dating companies have started here just in the last few months, and already they're proving successful. The national dating services, Cupid.com and 8minuteDating.com, are run in Tulsa by two different women.

Jada Butler decided to open Cupid.com because, as a single 25-year-old in Tulsa, she found it hard to meet guys outside of the bar scene.

"You can go to the library. You can go to the coffee shops," she said, "but good luck."

Judi Grove, a 52-year-old mother of two grown children, opened the 8minuteDating.com franchise because she wants to give everyone a chance to have what she has — a husband of 35 years.

"I have a lot of single friends, and I



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Neda Ashkar (right) listens to potential date Brian Holdeman during an eight-minute dating session at the Full Moon Cafe.

### for more INFORMATION

If you're interested in any of the new dating services in Tulsa, this is their contact information.

It's Just Lunch, 585-3668, [www.itsjustlunch.com](http://www.itsjustlunch.com)

Cupid.com, 810-3233, [www.cupid.com](http://www.cupid.com)

8minuteDating, 691-3874, [www.8minute-dating.com](http://www.8minute-dating.com)

would give anything for them to have that (lifetime companion)," she said.

This isn't the first time the Tulsa World has written about speed dating. We introduced readers to the concept more than two years ago when two locally owned speed-dating companies opened. Both of them have apparently closed.

Here's how speed dating works: The dating service gathers an equal number of single men and women, who are grouped together by some similarity — usually it's age — and pairs them off for short "dates."

The dates are generally between six to 10 minutes, depending on who's running the event.

Of course the speed dates arranged

by 8minuteDating are eight minutes long. They're six minutes with Cupid.com, which calls its operation "predating."

The gist of speed dating is that people realize within a matter of minutes whether they click with someone, and speed dating gives singles numerous chances for that to happen in one night.

The environment was relaxed when 16 singles between the ages of 30 and 40 gathered in a private room at Full Moon one night last week for an 8minuteDating event.

The dress was casual, as were the eight eight-minute "dates" each person had. After all, how serious can such a short conversation be?

But the point isn't deep discussion. It's to figure out if you'd like to meet this person again either as a friend, business contact or a date. If two people are mutually interested, 8minuteDating gives each person the contact information for the other — everything is done online — and the singles go from there.

Brian Holdeman said the speed-dating event at Full Moon was the first time he's done that type of thing.

The 34-year-old said meeting a single woman in his age group is difficult because most of them are divorced with children and don't get out much. The bar scene never worked well for

him, and he uses online dating but hasn't had much luck. Everyone online is hiding something, Holdeman said.

After meeting eight single women on that recent night, Holdeman said he had a good time. Did he find anyone especially interesting?

"We'll see," he said.

Cupid.com debuts in Tulsa at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Joe's Crab Shack, 7646 E. 61st St., for singles ages 26 to 39. A second event for ages 39 to 52 will be Aug. 16 at Club Fusion.

8minuteDating continues its matchmaking ventures July 20 at Bobbisoxx for singles ages 45 to 59 years old, and again on July 26 at Full Moon for those 25 to 35 years old.

These dating services really cater to busy, professional singles who want to meet other singles. Online dating was once the boon for this population, but the surge in those services has slowed somewhat as users grew tired of people lying about themselves.

In-person dating services give singles another, perhaps more secure, option, Coleman said.

"People are very busy these days, and they don't have a lot of time to stand around a bar for hours waiting for Ms. or Mr. Right to come along," he said in a phone conversation from Los Angeles. ". . . There is definitely a need for (dating services), and the question is

whether they are reputable and whether they are going to deliver on their promises. That remains to be seen."

Before signing up with a service, Coleman suggests that singles ask questions, talk to former or current clients, and ask the service for something in writing, in case it doesn't live up to its promises.

A lot of these services aren't cheap, and Coleman said single consumers should shop wisely. An event at 8minuteDating is \$35, but \$27 for first-timers. Cupid charges \$40, or \$35 for those who register early.

The only way to use It's Just Lunch is to pay \$995 for a one-year membership, which guarantees at least 14 dates and can be put on hold. Ritzhaupt said It's Just Lunch clients, which already total approximately 300, and are mostly professionals in their late 20s to late 40s, are willing to pay for the convenience of the service.

"In today's world, we outsource everything," she said. "We outsource dry-cleaning. We outsource someone to clean our house, even to train us and get us in shape. They hire us because they want us to manage their social lives."

Leigh Woosley 581-8465  
leigh.woosley@tulsaworld.com