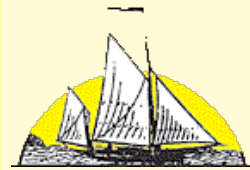


MAKING AN EIGHT-MINUTE CONNECTION

By Emily Dupuis - The Sun Staff

WESTERLY - Singles, get ready to make a great first impression.



Mystic River Press

One Westerly restaurant plans to host the town's first ever evening of speed dating - a round robin way of meeting people for dating and friendships that has swept the country.

On Monday, March 13 at 7 p.m. single professionals between ages 25 and 45 are invited to gather - with advance registration - at Nicola's Uptown Café.

Peter Bellone, owner of the 2 Tower St. restaurant, has teamed up with 8minuteDating, a Boston-based speed dating service that advertises "8 Great Dates - 1 Fun Night."

Event organizer Christine Misto described the evening as a "no pressure" way to socialize and recommended that participants approach the "dates" with an open mind.

"Look at it as a real fun night. It's really a way to get together stress-free," she said.

Eligible bachelors and bachelorettes will be divided into two groups of 16 - ages 25 to 35 and 35 to 45 - and paired for eight one-on-one conversations.

After eight minutes, the host rings a bell and participants note on a card if they would like another date with that person, before moving onto the next candidate.

Halfway through the evening, attendees can break for 20 minutes to talk with those they have met and others who have caught their eyes.

After the eighth date, all are invited to mingle and enjoy a cash bar, complimentary appetizers and a chance to win a \$35 restaurant gift certificate.

Misto said no last names are exchanged and no dates proposed that night.

After the event, participants can input any new acquaintances they would like to date on the service's Web site. The site automatically e-mails contact information to any matches.

8minuteDating boasts that over 90 percent of participants meet someone they want to see again, according to the service's Web site.

Online Poll

The new season of HBO's "The Sopranos" begins Sunday night. Who do you think will be the first person to 'sleep with the fishes' this season?

- Junior Soprano
- Christopher Moltisanti
- Johnny "Sack" Sacramoni
- Janice Soprano
- Paulie Walnuts
- Little Carmine Lupertazzi
- None of the above

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Misto said the dating service hopes to host more local gatherings if the first proves successful.

A chance to meet a match costs \$35 and participants must register in advance. For more information or to register, visit www.8minuteDating.com.

edupuis@thewesterlysun.com

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