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Packet Top Stories

Ten dates in one night? Eh, not a problem

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12/13/2005

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Staff photo by Mark Czajkowski

Kristen Donahue, a 27-year-old teacher, reflects on her experience -- which she described as "awesome" -- following a night of speed-dating at the Annex Restaurant in Princeton.

Speed-dating phenomenon at the Annex Restaurant helps singles race toward romance

It's the oldest story in the book.

Girl meets boy. Girl and boy chat for eight minutes and rank each other on scorecards. If girl likes boy and boy likes girl, a computer Web site matches them up, and they live happily ever after.

OK, maybe it's not the oldest story in the book, but for some Princetonians, this so-called speed-dating adds a welcome twist to the old-fashioned fairytale. Offered twice a month at the Annex Restaurant & Cocktail Lounge, speed-dating hops suitors from date to date, as they comb the crowd for their prince — or princess — charming.

First-time speed-dater Kristen Donahue described her experience as "awesome."

"I just thought it was the easiest and most

nonthreatening way to date," she said. "Even if you're stuck with someone uninteresting, it's not a big deal to just chew the fat for a little bit."

The 27-year-old schoolteacher said the sheer quantity of dates "made it a fun night out."

"You get to date 10 people in one night," she said. "It kind of helps you shape what you're looking for in a guy."

Annex owner Richard Carnevale, who prefers to witness the spectacle rather than participate in it, agreed that the format offers unique advantages.

"Meeting them face to face, if you don't like what you see, you only have to deal with them for eight minutes and then you move on," he said. "It's controlled."

"I think it beats online dating," Mr. Carnevale added. "It beats the bar scene."

The mixers — there have been 10 so far — don't hurt business either, according to Mr. Carnevale.

"Obviously those people are a little nervous and they indulge," he laughed. "It's a great bar night for us."

Nonparticipating patrons also enjoy the show, Mr. Carnevale said.

"They're like, can I get a table with a better view?" he said.

The Annex soirees are run by a Boston-based company, 8minuteDating.com. Through the company's Web site, searching singles pay \$35 to register for nearby speed dates. Once an equal number of male and female participants sign up, the daters, who are grouped by age, receive e-mails about the time and location of their meet and greet.

Mr. Carnevale says the Annex, which started hosting speed dates in June, draws daters from New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania. A good night will see 30 participants, he estimated.

"I'm shocked, because these are all young, good-looking people," Mr. Carnevale said.

"They're all young professionals."

Upon entering the bar, daters are given a nametag and dating card with table assignments. A giant act of musical chairs begins with one eight-minute rendezvous, and eight more quickie dates follow. Halfway through, there is an "intermission," providing some much-needed respite for conversation-weary participants.

The evening ends with speed-daters marking each other into categories including "friendship," "second date" or "business connection" — all done anonymously via computer.

Ms. Donahue, perhaps, was one of the lucky ones.

"I wound up going on a date from it," she said. "And it wasn't a blind date, because I already knew he was physically attractive."

A speed-date success story?

Maybe not.

"We didn't go out after that," Ms. Donahue said. "It turns out we're just completely different people."

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