

The Clock is Ticking

Speed dating helps people meet their match--in just eight minutes

By Rebekka Coakley

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In general, dating is not fun.

If you meet someone who catches your eye, first you have to determine if he or she is single. If you're good, maybe you find that out after 20 minutes of conversation.

Then, you have to work up the nerve to ask this attractive person out. Say, another 15 minutes. If you're lucky or charming enough, he or she will say yes and you meet for dinner or drinks.

That's at least another hour and a half for you to determine if this person is worth any more of your time. Time is precious; so who wants to waste even two hours on Mr. or Ms. Wrong?

Four years ago, an entrepreneur in Boston named Tom Jaffe started a speed dating event that cuts to the chase when it comes to preliminary fact-finding and compatibility assessment. Called 8minuteDating, the events are set up at a restaurant or bar where people go by first names only and have eight dates lasting eight minutes each, all in one evening.

Last Thursday, 8minuteDating came to Johnstown. Hosted at the Johnstown Brewing Company on Pine Grove Lane, 30 single people (15 men, 15 women) went on eight dates in under two hours. None wishes to reveal their last names.

I just sit in a cubicle all day at work, said Carol, 38, an employee for USAir who drove from Greensburg to attend the event. I don't meet any people.

Although she'd never done speed dating before, Carol said she was interested in giving this a shot.

I don't have any great expectations for the evening, she said. It's just one of the many things a single woman does to meet people. It's just another night out.

Rebecca Reyes of Johnstown hosted the evening's event.

I am originally from San Antonio, so, as an outsider [in Pennsylvania], I found it difficult to meet eligible single professionals," Reyes said. "I discovered 8minuteDating and went to an event in Pittsburgh. I had a great time and met lots of great people, but there were no events in this area. That's when I decided to coordinate an event here.

Here's how 8minuteDating works: a single person signs up at www.8minutedating.com for an event in his or her area and age group. After paying a \$35 fee, an equal number of single men and women gather at a restaurant and over the course of two hours, dates eight other singles for eight minutes each. Each serial dater is given a name tag, a number and a card with sample questions for each date and a place to keep notes on each person he or she meets.

Halfway through the dating process, there is a 20-minute intermission, a chance to mingle with everyone and order another drink (to calm nerves or make everyone a little more attractive). At the end of the night, participants log onto the 8minuteDating Web site and enter the names of the people they want to meet again. If two people enter each other's names, 8minuteDating will send the contact information to both people so they can make a regular date.

The crowd at the Johnstown Brewing Company ranged from 30 to 49 years of age, with one exception. Nick Dickum, 23, of New Paris works with computers and was the youngest dater at the event. He had signed up for a younger age group but did not know that event was canceled.

I was a little nervous before I got here, but my tension broke as soon as I looked around and noticed I was the youngest one here, Dickum said cheerfully.

Asked if he met any potential dates, he said he would just be friends with everyone he met since some of them were his mother's age.

People actually want to be here and it's different from the bar scene. I would tell my friends and co-workers to try one of these, he added.

Arlene, 31, of Johnstown is a Web developer and claimed she was dragged to the event by her friend, Reyes. She ended up saying she was glad she attended. She said that eight minutes is just enough time to tell whether or not she would be interested in seeing someone again.

I would recommend it, she said of the event. Give it a try. You never know who you'll meet and there's no obligation.

Checking back in with Carol, who before the event was pondering whether eight minutes would be too long with some of the people she saw there, she said things were going well and everyone was very nice.

I feel like I'm on a job interview, she joked. But it's interesting to meet people you never would have met before.

Halfway through the night, she said that she only wanted to be friends with the people she had met, but she was willing to attend another event again.

For more information, contact Reyes at rebeccar@8minutedating.com.

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