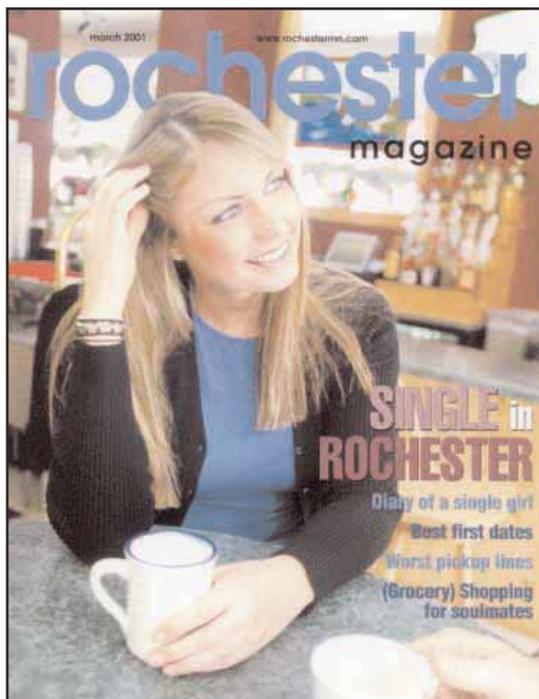


Matchmaker, Make Me a Match

(Find me a find. Catch me a catch)



Hopelessly romantic, attractive SF, never married, ISO financially secure SM or DM (N/S N/drugs only) for long walks on the beach, candlelit dinners, backpacking and possible LTR.

If you know how to decipher that paragraph - or if your screen name is *studmuffin* - chances are you've been looking for love in all the wrong places. Don't worry, you're not alone. Forty percent of all Americans over 25 are single - 30,000 of them right here in Rochester. Most (lets be honest) are looking for a soul mate. Many are tired of the hit-or-miss game of bar-hopping, personal ads, online chat rooms and video dating services.

There is another way.

Professional matchmaking - as old as romance itself - is making a comeback. According to Amy Rolando, founder and president of Table for Two - a Minneapolis based matchmaking service with offices in Denver, Phoenix and Rochester - "it just makes sense." Rolando describes her clients as well-educated (98 percent have at least a four-year degree), high-achieving professionals - average age 40-45 - who are busy, single and need help connecting with the right kind of people.

Table for Two makes it easy. True, it takes courage to take the first step. The up-front membership fee entitles singles for 12 months of hand-picked matches, redeemable over a two-year period and runs \$1795. Quality of dates over quantity is the goal. The difference between a dating service and a matchmaking service, Rolando explains, lies in the art of individualized *matching*. A dating service may give you access to lots of people's pictures, bios, even videos. A matchmaker is someone who (as your mother might say) "fixes you up" - with a person they know a tremendous amount about.

Rolando and her staff do not rely on computer data bases or psychological tests to make their matches. "Intuition is probably 70 percent of it," she admits. The rest is science and kismet. Here's how it works: A client representative interviews each new member, one-on-one, at length, asking questions like, "How would you describe yourself?" and "What characteristics are you looking for in a date?" After the interview, the matchmaker goes back to the office and brainstorms with other staffers about who the new client might "click" with.

A weather forecaster by trade (she was the WCCO-TV meteorologist in the mid-90's and in 1993 founded Weather Watch, a private weather forecasting service), Rolando enjoys making predictions. "It's a kick. It's kind of like mixing chemicals together to see what kind of reaction you're going to get," she says. "If it doesn't work out, they've only invested an hour or two - just a lunch or dinner. And there's always that next date to look forward to."

"Table for Two is not for people who can't get dates," the 30-ish entrepreneur is quick to point out. "In fact, most of

our clients would never think of using a dating service. It's for people who wake up, take stock and decide they're ready to try something different." For instance: "Maybe it's the corporate guy who always assumed he'd get married and raise a family - and all of a sudden one day he's 38, and he says, 'Gosh, I haven't met anyone.'" That's the guy Table for Two targets. Or the divorced mom who wouldn't know where to begin to find available, high-quality men (i.e. not nut cases) - but isn't ready for the rocking chair and knitting needles, either.

"People want to meet people," Rolando states simply. "Our clients use all kinds of professional services. They have a cleaning person, they work out with a personal trainer, and they use an online grocer. A matchmaking service is just another step."

The question remains: If people want so badly to connect, why are there so many lonely hearts out there? Part of the problem may be unrealistic expectations and rigidly high standards. Amy Rolando sees this every day. "Some people will come in with a laundry list of 30 or more prerequisites," she says. Some are bizarrely specific. Like the client who only wanted to meet people who loved spicy food. Or the woman who stipulated her dates had to have a shoe size of 11-1/2 or larger. To that client, Rolando tactfully replied, "You know what? We don't measure shoe size." Nor, for that matter, does Table for Two share photographs. It's a long-standing policy - part of the company's business model - based on Rolando's instincts about human nature ... and the mysterious chemistry of attraction. It seems to be working.

-Marcia Cipriani