

The Matchmaker

AMY ROLANDO RUNS A CONFIDENTIAL DATING SERVICE FOR PROFESSIONALS

Amy Rolando, a meteorologist by training and an entrepreneur at heart, insists that her latest business venture--an Edina-based dating service called Table for Two--is just "forecasting in a different sense."

Rolando started Table for Two in August 1996 on the heels of her success with Weather Watch, a private weather-forecasting company she started in 1995 after leaving a position as a meteorologist with WCCO-TV. She became interested in the dating service industry when a friend called seeking advice about an idea to start an upscale



Amy Rolando, owner of Table for Two dating service.

dating service in Toronto.

As Rolando began researching the idea and talking with people who had worked for various dating services in the Twin Cities, she discovered there was a great potential in this market for a dating service that catered to business men and women by promising complete confidentiality and a safe environment for a date. She decided to pursue the idea on her own in the Twin Cities.

Table for Two, the only dating service of its kind in the Twin Cities, relies purely on human intuition--Rolando's--to make matches. Rolando interviews every potential client herself. She also conducts background checks on each client and determines from her personal discussions which pairs might make good matches. Once she decides two clients seem like a good match, she sets up a lunch date for them, ensuring complete confidentiality by using only their first names and arranging in advance for each client to pay his or her own tab.

"We're very selective about who our clients are," Rolando says. "I have another source of income," she says, referring to Weather Watch, so she can be more selective about who she accepts as clients. Rolando estimates that of the 25 phone calls Table for Two receives each day, about half are good potential clients.

"We don't use pictures. We don't use videos," Rolando says. Instead, she matches people up, "by listening to each of my clients and really getting to know them, what they are like as a person, and what their values are."

For \$975--a fee clients pay up front--Rolando establishes a goal of arranging eight lunch dates in 12 months. "It's like a retainer," she says "I'm their personal headhunter." The eight-lunch-date target is just a goal, she says, because she doesn't want to

waste her clients' time by matching them up just for the sake of fulfilling a quota.

Clients can choose to put their membership on hold at any time. "Let's say on the third lunch date, they hit it off with a person and they start seeing them on a regular basis; they can put their membership on hold for two years."

Rolando's formula has met with great success, particularly among professionals and business executives. "Because of my background in the media," she says, "I know that confidentiality and safety are very important." Whenever a potential client calls, Rolando offers to meet at the caller's office, which is not only more convenient, but also allows the client to avoid walking into the storefront of dating service.

Many of Rolando's clients are divorced or widowed and find it difficult to meet people in the typical singles social circles. Her client base also includes many high-profile individuals--from business, politics, and the media. "It's even more difficult for those people to let others know they are available," she says. "Many of my clients are VPs, CEOs, and CFOs of major corporations here and they need to be more discreet," she says.

Rolando says she plans to take her model to other cities: "We're already looking at where we should go next."

-Kate Peterson