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SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT: 8 Minute Dating

Speed Dating A New Option For Border Singles

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EL PASO --

In today's fast-paced world where we've grown accustomed to fast-food, high speed internet access and instant news coverage, the latest trend should come as no surprise.

It's called speed dating. In less than a couple of hours on a Saturday night, you can have at least 8 dates and if you think you know in the first couple of minutes, you're not clicking with your date, don't worry, you only have to spend six more minutes with them. That's the promise of "8 Minute Dating", the latest option for meeting a mate in the 21st century.

Singles who used to rely on family, friends or co-workers to hook them up or who went looking for love in bars, have found new inspiration on the internet at 8minutedating.com.

Sonia Rivera runs the El Paso franchise of 8 Minute Dating. "I moved back to El Paso from Chicago in 1997 and was doing the bar scene, going out and meeting people and it became increasingly difficult, more difficult as I matured."

Sonia is a Kindergarten teacher. But she's also a single woman, who likes watching TV shows about single women. "I was watchng 'Sex and the City' and Miranda had gone through, on that episode, she went through 8 minute dating and I just thought, gosh that is such a cool concept."

After doing some on-line research, Rivera and another single El Paso woman then bought the local Franchise for 8-minute dating. "We get started at 7:30 and then what we do is we guarantee that you'll have 8 dates for 8 minutes apiece."

At an 8 Minute Dating event at Ardivino's Desert Crossing in Sunland Park, Sonia reminds the men and women who've gathered of some of the rules. "Please do not give out any business cards or phone numbers."

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For \$3, these single men and women get to work the tables, holding one on one conversations for 8 minutes a time. Bob Bizzoco is one of them. "I don't think its too fast and furious at all. You do get 8 minutes or so and sometimes that's a really long 8 minutes. And sometimes you'd like it be a little longer."

Bizzoco is a divorcee who works out at White Sands Missile Range. He spends a lot of time traveling in his job and doesn't meet many women out at the missile range. So, he decided to give 8 minute dating a try. "I don't really do the club scene very much. And when I do I'm a little on the shy side, so I won't really go up to someone and talk to 'em. This way its kind of a mutual thing y'know."

Rivera explains how the evening works. "We actually do ring a bell and we tell you when to get started and we'll time it for 8 minutes. We'll ring the bell again and tell you to wrap up your conversation and move on to the next date. When a person registers that night, we give them a dating card and then you fill out that person's name and its very safe because we ask not to give out last names. So, you would put the other person's first name and a 3-digit code that we provide you with. You mark if you'd like to meet them again for business, friendship or a second date."

With the card, you can keep track of your dates and make little notes about them. And if your stuck for conversation topics, just look on back of the card. There are examples of questions you might want to ask, like "Where did you grow up" "What do you do for Fun? The best trip you've ever taken?"

"Very nice to meet you." "Nice chatting with you." The couples exchange their pleasantries and thought during the evening. Then after their 8 dates, the log-on to the 8 minute dating website and if there's someone they'd like to meet again... they mark them down. Rivera explains. "You can make a match for someone for a second date, friendship or business. That other person has to mark you for the exact same thing. So, to increase your chances, mark all of them. (laughs) A little way to better your odds (laughs)"

This new kind of dating makes sense to El Paso psychotherapist Judy Ackers. "People have their lives on 15 minute schedules practically." She believes ideas like 8 minute dating are here to stay because there are so many busy people., so many lonely people and so many people with fragmented families or who's social networks are limited, because of all the moving around they do. Ackers says, "People are meant to be in relationships. People are social, sexual creatures and we're meant to be with other people. But the opportunities are so limited."

While the internet has opened up a world wide web of new opportunities to find love, Ackers says it can be a dangerous world. She says one of her clients was stalked by someone she met on-line. Ackers believes problems like that are another reason why web-sites like 8 minute dating, are becoming more popular. "You still don't have to give your name, where you live, your telephone number until you

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make up your mind that this is a person that you'd like to take that chance with."

Sonia Rivera says it works. In fact, her business partner, Monica Parra says she found her boyfriend through speed dating. "I actually am a success story. I've dated somebody for the past 2, 3 months almost who I met through 8 minute dating."


And despite some apprehensions and the presence of TV cameras, Bob says he had fun tonight. "First person I met, I was a little nervous, kinda getting a little sweaty. But it has gotten easier."

Bob had to leave for Alaska because of his job just two days after that 8 minute dating event. He's still there but he contacted KFOX News At Nine by email to say he's exchanged information with three women he met that night and has lunch set up with two of them when he gets back into town.

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