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Guys and dolls match up in dating game

By REKA BALA
Staff Writer

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WATCHUNG -- Searching for one special date on Valentine's Day was not a problem for some Central Jerseyans.

In fact, at least 100 of them had eight dates that night.

Singles from all parts of the state gathered at Colorado Cafe on Saturday evening for "8 Minute Dating," an event that allows people to speed through dates and meet others in a relaxed and informal setting.

"You get to mingle with people and talk with people where there's no pressure," said event organizer Pamela Kobrin. "That's the advantage of '8 Minute Dating.' You know the people there are single and want to meet people ... and it's discreet."

The event, which began about 5 p.m., featured two age groups: 25- to 35-year-olds and 35- to 49-year-olds. Participants were given a card with their first name and an identification number on it. The card also directed them to specific tables where each of the eight dates would take place. The club was modified to accommodate the large event by splitting the dance floor into two sides for the different age groups.

The evening functioned in an organized manner: couples went to specific tables listed on their dating cards, talked to each other for eight minutes and then moved to another table. A 15-minute intermission followed four dates, and then participants would begin another set of four dates.

At the end of each date, singles could list any person on their cards they wished to communicate with again.

Kobrin said the event was a great idea because it takes the "pressure" off. No one is allowed to ask anyone else out on a date, get phone numbers or last names or find out anything confidential about them, she said.

Participants would also later log onto the the 8minutedating.com Web site and list the IDs of people they were interested in, she said. If there's a mutual match, both people would be notified.

"This is a way to attend a party where the barriers go away," Kobrin said.

But for many event-goers, the night was focused more on the pleasure of talking with new and interesting people who all wanted to meet someone and make a connection.

Marissa DeCicco of Flemington, accompanied by her sister Alessandra of Raritan Borough, came to the event because she had previously attended speed dating activities and enjoyed them.

"No one wants to be alone on (this) night," Marissa DeCicco said, adding that she convinced her sister to join because she always has had fun.

At the end of the night, Marissa DeCicco, 30, said there was at least one person whom she would like to see again.

Charlie Mascenik, 38, of Bedminster said that although he was initially coerced by his cousin to attend the event, he ended up having a good time and might go to another one in the future.

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Even groups of friends who came to the event together said they wanted to just have fun.

Maria Shinas of Mountainside said she would signal to her other friends if a date was going badly.

And Red Bank resident Irene Vazquez, one of Shinas' friends, said she had no problem being able to tell in eight minutes if each man was a "stud or a dud."

Reka Bala can be reached at (908) 707-3155 or at rbala@c-n.com.

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