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Shortcut to romance Busy people hope eight-minute 'dates' lead them to Mr. or Ms. Right

By [KEVIN CORVO](#)

Not everyone associates unpleasant things with the term "blind date."

Eric and Marilyn Stowers certainly don't. They will soon celebrate their 15th anniversary after meeting on a blind date.

The couple now offers the same opportunity for success to other people who are having difficulty finding the "right one" or are simply too busy to even begin the dating process.

The Stowers are event organizers for 8minuteDating organization founded by Tom Jaffee in 2002.

"The purpose is to allow busy people the chance to meet other people who would like to date," Marilyn said. "People can actually write this down on their calendar and set aside the time for it."

On a Tuesday night last month, during the week before Valentine's Day, 67 men and women did just that.

They converged on Dave & Busters, 3665 Park Mill to give the speeded-up form of dating a try.

On this particular night, they were joined by thousands who were taking part in 8minuteDating events throughout the United States.

The Stowers told those gathered at the Hilliard food-and-entertainment venue that they were part of the largest-ever date, with 121 such events being held in 121 cities.



News photos by Tim Norton
Madison County resident Tim Norton talks with one of the women during last month's 8minuteDating event at Dave and Busters. The pre-Valentine's Day event was part of a "National Cupid's Day" celebration held in 121 venues across the country.



Hilliard resident Kristen Stowers met her husband, Eric, through the 8minuteDating organization. She is seen here talking to one of her dates during last month's 8minuteDating event.

Assigned dates

Each 8minuteDating event is tailored by the organizer, but all operate within a similar framework.

The Stowers arrange for two age groups to meet with each other; those between the ages of 25 and 35, and those between the ages of 35 and 49. An even number of participants are registered, though absentees resulted in an odd number showing up at last month's event.



A man and a woman take eight minutes to get acquainted after meeting at February's 8minuteDating event at Dave and Buster's.

Participants wear labels bearing their first name and an assigned number. Each receives a card on which to write eight names. Beside each name are three boxes labeled "business," "friendship" and "second date."

Participants receive an assignment card directing them to a table, also identified by a number. The man and woman who report to the same table have eight minutes to talk to each other and mark their cards before a bell rings and all the participants move to another table as indicated on their assignment card.

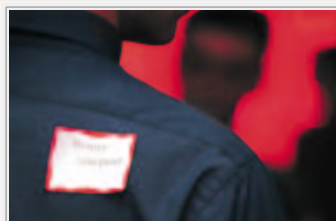
After the event, the cards are studied, and any two people who met each other and marked the same box -- indicating their interest in a business connection, friendship or a second date -- are sent notifications by e-mail about the match. They can then enter the organization's Web site to retrieve contact information.

"We've had several marriages come out of 8minuteDating," Marilyn said.

Looking for romance

Among those who participated in last month's date at Dave & Buster's, the third event hosted by the Stowers at the venue, was a 34-year-old woman named Kristen.

Kristen, an attorney, said she had participated in similar events before, but this was the first time she had tried 8minuteDating.



As a part of a game played at the 8minuteDating event, a man wears a name tag on his back with the name of half of a famous couple. Each person had to ask other people questions to find the person who was wearing the name of the other member of the couple.

"I do this because I'm so busy. If it's not on a calendar, I probably won't get it done," she said.

Kristen added that she tries to keep an open mind during such experiences.

"How much can you really learn in eight minutes? The idea is to

build a good rapport," she said.

Kristen said some people, both men and women, ask heavy questions such as about marriage or children.

"That's not the way to approach it," she said.

John, 41, attended the gathering after being mildly coerced by his co-workers at the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office.

"My colleagues take an interest in my personal life, but they mean well," said John, who found an advertisement for 8minuteDating taped to his desk at work.

"I had never seriously considered it, but after reading the ad, it sounded like a good idea," John said. "It's an easy way to meet people, and everyone seems friendly."

The event drew people from outside Columbus, too, including 55-year-old Edna, a widow who lives in a small Madison County village.

"I just don't have situations to meet people," said Edna, adding that she is friendly and always looks for the best in people.

Scott, 26, following the "if at first you don't succeed" adage, has attended all three 8minuteDating events at Dave & Busters.

"The bar scene is just not there, and it's difficult to meet people on the job," said Scott, who works at Honda of America.

Rhett seeks Scarlett

In addition to the timed meetings, the event also includes a game allowing for an additional encounter. A sticker is placed on the back of each participant bearing the name of a person who is half of a famous couple.

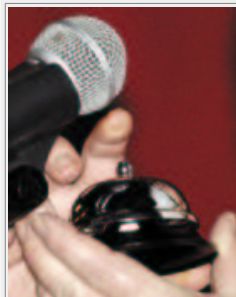
The man who is tagged Rhett Butler starts asking questions in an attempt to find Scarlett O'Hara, while Fred Astaire tries to find Ginger Rodgers, and so on.

At the conclusion of the evening, a raffle is held to give away prizes, including a dinner for two at Dave & Busters and a two-night stay at a Florida hotel.

The Stowers, who had to pass an interview process to become event organizers, said they were looking for something to do together. Plus, they wanted to find a way to repay the person who arranged their blind date.

"We don't know how to find him anymore, so this is how we're returning the favor," Marilyn said.

Registration for 8minuteDating is accepted only online at



Event organizer Marilyn Stowers rings a bell to let participants know it's time to switch to their next eight-minute date.

<http://www.8minutedating.com>. The cost is \$35.

The next local event is scheduled for March 23 at Dave & Busters. Two additional events are scheduled in April at the Bristol Bar, 132 E. Fifth Ave.

"We want to allow others the same chance we had," Marilyn said.
"We know (blind dates) can grow into so much more."