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8-Minute Dating

By Matt Johnson

Speed date offers singles peeks at prospects

Casey Carpenter was looking for a new way to meet Miss Right. He was tired of the bar and club scene, which he says is too loud to have a decent conversation.

Enter 8minuteDating.

The company, which was formed in Boston in 2001 to give people an alternative to the traditional ways of finding a mate, recently found a home in El Paso when schoolteacher Sonia Rivera and her friend, Monica Parra, opened a franchise in March.

The premise is simple. You log on to www.8minuteDating.com and register for one of the events at either Panache L'Experience, 1550 Hawkins, Suite 21, or Ardivino's Desert Crossing, 1 Ardivino Drive in Sunland Park. There is about one event a month. After you register, the hosts, Rivera and Parra, collect an equal number of women and men and send out confirmations.

At the event, you'll be seated at a table across from a member of the opposite sex. The two of you chat for eight minutes -- not long enough to get to know each other but not long enough to be painful. Then you play musical chairs and sit across from another person. You get eight "dates" with a 20-minute break in between where you mingle with the other participants.

After the event, you go home, log back on to the site and select whom you would go out with on a real date, whom you would be friends with and so on. If you and another person select each other as being datable, each will be e-mailed the other's contact information. After that, you're on your own to make a call or shoot an e-mail to your prospective soul mate.

When West Side resident Carpenter gave 8minuteDating a try at a recent event, he didn't make a love connection, but he had a good time.

"I have met some wonderful friends by doing it," he said.



And he plans to do it again.

Carpenter, 39, said a few of the eight-minute sessions feel as if they are a half-hour long, but sometimes the seconds fly by and you really connect with someone.

"It was probably the best experience I've had in the single world," he said, which was exactly why Rivera started the franchise.

Navigate the scene

Requirements: Participants must be single professionals, which means you have to have a steady job. You must also have access to a computer.

Age limit: There's no age limit, but it's suggested that participants be 30-45.

Cash to take: Carry enough money to buy a few drinks for yourself and possibly someone you meet.

Will there be a connection: The company reports 90 percent and more of participants meet someone whom they want to see again, and at least 99 percent report that they enjoyed the event.

How many opportunities: A typical event at Panache L'Experience or Ardovino's Desert Crossing can include between nine and 12 couples.

What to wear: Dress as if you're going to a job interview at a relaxed company. Don't wear a three-piece suit, but leave the torn-up jeans in the closet.