

This queen of hearts has a let's-get-down-to-business approach to romance

Miss Match

BY KATHERINE DEDYNA
Times Colonist staff

There's no bow and arrow in her hand and she's certainly not chubby — or naked — but Jane Carstens proudly calls herself a professional cupid. Wearing a serious black pinstriped pantsuit softened by navy silk shirt and projecting a bespectacled let's-get-down-to-business approach to romance, the West Coast manager for Hearts Introduction Services earns her living as a full-time matchmaker.

She's armed with personal knowledge of some 400 B.C. residents — including about 80 on the Island — intent on meeting someone and willing to spend \$1,000 for Carstens to set it up.

"I'm coming here once a week meeting clients, booked solid every day," she says, sipping on a Coke in a Herald Street café between appointments, her blue eyes blazing.

With her stylish looks, she bears no similarity to anyone's grizzled yenta, the go-between of long ago. Nor is there anything touchy-feely about her demeanour.

"I use my signature strengths — good listening skills and good problem solving," she says. "It's an objective opinion. It's not just what you think of yourself — it's what an expert thinks, who does it for a living."

While Internet dating, video dating, speed dating (the latter elicits a painful grimace from her) have their pluses in the mating game, her plan of romantic attack begins at home, with a one-hour one-to-one meeting.

"You, as a person, tend to be comfortable when you're in your own environment, so it gives me a true picture of who you really are — more conversation than interview process. I see the lifestyle — the way you live. We look at the whole package and what the person is looking for in a partner."

The at-home chats are free and give potential clients a chance to assess her, too. The questionnaire she fills out for each isn't particularly involved, skimming through educational background to religious and recreational preferences and the ubiquitous qualities the client desires in a partner.

It's only when she says she thinks she has a match in mind that the \$1,000 membership fee kicks in. There's also a \$15 monthly administration fee for active files.

That's cheap, if the first date leads to Ms. or Mr. Right. And membership goes on as long as clients want: "We'll keep matching you on a once-a-month basis 'til you tell us to stop," she says. Carstens goes through her files and finds the people she thinks will click and then writes a short profile of each and gives it to the other, including their names, occupations and phone numbers.

The gender breakdown of her client list holds no surprise. It's about 65 per cent female; 35 per cent male. Most of her roster has never tried other methods to meet mates. They're not the bar-hopping crowd, and many on the Island are in their 50s and 60s.

No photos are exchanged. "Sometimes Mr. Right doesn't present himself as Mr. Right. You have to look beyond what's presented or you could be passing up the best thing that ever happened to you."

It's up to the couple to break the ice on their own. But she encourages them to report back to her with their impressions. "Then I can hone in for the next match."

Most clients average about six match-ups for their investment.

Peggy, 65, a Greater Victoria widow, has been matched five times, but so far nothing has jelled. She met only one of the five men in person and it was clear he had the proverbial "one thing in mind."

The other four were phone contacts that went no further, either because of travel plans; because neither wanted a long-distance relationship or because she called the man first. "They want to do the calling," she has learned.

She wasn't put off by the price. "If you want quality, you're not going to pay \$50," she says, adding "the



Jane Carstens is a New Age, old-fashioned matchmaker.

Bruce Stotesbury/Times Colonist

good thing about Hearts is that you know the other party is also looking."

While she doesn't particularly want to get married, she'd consider it with the right man. "I'm really looking for a companion to go out with, to go on a trip with. It's not like I'm on tenterhooks waiting. I'm relaxed about it."

While there have been "several hundred" marriages in the 18 years since Hearts was established in Toronto, there has been only one marriage and one engagement

on the West Coast since Carstens established the business here in early 2002.

"We've got lots of clients still seeing each other. A lot of people don't get married right away," she says.

She confirms what some of the most attractive and established singles out there already know: They can be harder to match.

Why? "They're unapproachable. I find the average person is easier to match."

Please see MATCH, C3



Waters, left, and Shenher: Clicked right away.

They found love beyond stopwatch

Six-minute speed date put couple on fast track to a relationship

BY KATHERINE DEDYNA
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There were good vibes from the second they laid eyes on each other. And it's a good thing, because their first meeting lasted only six minutes — par for the course in speed-dating.

It was enough to put Kathryn Shenher and Ray Waters on the fast track to love, and they've been snuggling happily ever since.

The couple met Feb. 26 at an Island Rendezvous event that hosted 32 singles and required the men to move from table to table at Earl's Restaurant in order to meet 16 women for six minutes apiece. And just when the night was almost over, their turn came around.

Although they have homes just two blocks apart at the Oak Bay border, the lovebirds had never run into one another before. Now they're spending virtually all their time together.

It was a just a fun night out for \$20, with neither suspecting they'd meet the mate of their dreams on their first speed date.

"The moment I sat down, there was attraction and laughter the whole six minutes," recalls Waters, 37, who works in sales and technology for Rexall. "She was the only one I went out with. It just felt that after that first date I felt that I had known her my whole life."

Shenher had a good first impression too, based on their shared interests in golf and hiking, his niceness and comfort with the fact that she has a young son. An extrovert with a huge smile, she went out with a couple of the other guys she met for six minutes but after her first extended date with Waters at Christie's Pub a week later, she knew.

Speed dating "changed my life," says the RCMP police dispatcher, describing Ray as "way more

understanding than any other man I've met."

She was amazed at the similarities they share. "Our dads have the same birthday, our sisters have the same name and his cat looks exactly like my cat and a bunch of other freaky things."

She also loves how close he is to his family, still dropping in on his grandmother every day.

Shenher can't imagine writing a personal ad or arranging for sitters to go on blind dates, and Waters wasn't into the bar scene. Both were impressed with the calibre of others trying out the speed dating scene, but found the momentum overwhelming, although both would have done it again had they not met each other.

They find it awkward telling people how they got together, but others are intrigued as the practice of speed dating gains familiarity.

Shenher and Water's speed dating success thrills Emily Nelson, who operates Island Rendezvous and now has more than 600 members involved with speed-dating events. "That's very rewarding for me."