



Up to Date?

Richmonders look for love in traditional places but in a lot of new ones, too

— BY DIANE YORK —

— ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIN HURLEY-BROWN —

All you need is love, say John Lennon and Paul McCartney. But where to find it?

Richmonders looking for love can find it more places than ever. There are traditional venues: social events, clubs, weddings, classes, dances, church — and now even dog parks. Newer choices include speed dating, where you can meet one person every three minutes, and Internet dating, which can connect you to hundreds of possible mates. Introduction and dating services will do all the work for you.

Here are a few tips, offered with the help of Richmonders who have tried them. By the way, the people quoted are all real — though some requested fictitious names.

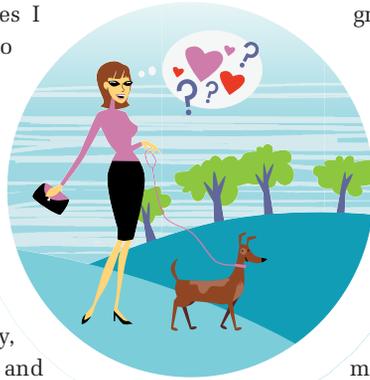
LOOKING TO MEET PEOPLE in a bar or pub? It should be on a small scale with an atmosphere of intimacy and comfort; too much background noise makes conversation impossible. And if you go there on a consistent basis, you will soon know all the regulars.

Stuart and Susan (not their real names) met at Shenanigans, a Cheers-type pub in North Side. Susan says, “We both knew lots of people there. Mutual friends introduced us.” Judy (not her real name) met her current boyfriend while leaving Enzo’s in Goochland. “It’s a nice place — you feel comfortable talking to new people there.”

Bill, a retired health professional, says, “I like to meet

people in a social setting, weddings, community events, the classes I take. This gives you a chance to develop a relationship before you start dating.”

One of the newer places to meet is a dog park. Daniel, who owns a very emotional beagle, met his ladylove at the Barker Field Dog Park in Byrd Park. She owns a pure-bred boxer and a mutt. Luckily, all three dogs got along great, and the rest is history. Daniel says, “The dog parks are a nice, casual way to get to know other people. You have something in common right away, and you know there will not be problems later about you owning a dog.”



THE INTERNET HAS QUICKLY BECOME one of the most popular ways to find love. The top three sites are Match.com (with 29,000 users), Chemistry.com (14,000) and eHarmony (11,000). But you can find specific dating sites for millionaires, ethnic groups, religions and even people with a weight problem.

While Internet dating works for some, you can wind up with many duds before you get one who clicks. As Maria (not her real name) says, “In the past five years, I’ve been on 50 first dates – I’ve counted them – [but] I’ve been in just a few relationships [and] only one that counts, i.e., I met the parents.”

Many say the nature of these online meetings is less than substantial. Bill says, “I feel best about a natural meeting. Net dating is synthetic — something is missing with that. I like a relationship to proceed along uncontrived lines.”

If you don’t mind pressure, try speed dating. Simply arrive at the appointed location looking your best. You have three minutes to sit in front of someone and be charming. A bell rings and you, in musical chairs fashion, go to the next table and try to impress that individual. At the end of the session, participants give a list of the people they want to contact to the organizer. If there is a match, info is exchanged. Whew!

Newer venues include the “Meetup” groups on the Internet. You pick an interest or hobby and simply Google it with the term “Meetups” and your city. You can instantly become part of a new group of people who also like salsa dancing, French cooking,



iguanas or a hundred other topics. Maria says, “The Meetup groups did work out well. I only attended a few times, met a guy who really liked me. He went all out for me. We dated a few times, but it didn’t go anywhere. I didn’t attend many of them, though. It is hard for me to attend them alone.”

It may not be the world’s oldest profession but matchmaker must be one of them. It Takes Two and It’s Just Lunch are two matchmaker services available in Richmond. Giles and Woody were clients of one. Woody says, “After trying Internet dating for five years, I decided to try It Takes Two, which set me up on the last match of my life. Giles, my last date, and I hit it off and are happily married. We still call it the last date.”

IN A HURRY? If none of the above has worked, you can do a sort of boot camp approach. A book called *Love in 90 Days*, by Dr. Diana Kirschner, guides readers on a military-style campaign to find the love of their life within 90 days.

Sound exhausting? As Kirschner says, “You have to figure out where to meet people, do your hair, dress up. It’s a lot of work, like having a second job. And if you are dating more than one person at a time, then it gets really complicated!”

What’s different about dating now compared with 10 to 15 years ago?

Katie (not her real name) says, “Because of the Internet, you have a bigger pool to draw from. But you have to be able to evaluate prospects quickly. You have to go with the flow. People come into your life, then disappear. I don’t take it personally. I don’t share my name right away. I am careful. In one year of Net dating, I have wound up dating perhaps three or four men.”

What’s wrong with dating today?

Maria says, “We believe that we should meet someone that we will be happy with forever, and if we are discontent or disillusioned, we should move on. Many times I’ve had magical three- or five-day experiences of magical connection, passion, soul mate-type connection, but that is not lifetime love.”

She adds, “Lifetime love is what you build over time. Love is what you build by what you go through together. You need to find someone who might be changing your diapers in 20 years.” **B**

Diane York is a Richmond-based freelance writer.