

New video dating service slow to attract students

By Jennifer E. Townsend
Reporter

A video dating service, the Singles Connection, recently has opened in Bryan, but not many Texas A&M students are rushing to join, an administrative assistant for the service said.

"We have gotten some calls from college students, but they take it more as a joke," Shelley Fleming said. "A lot of the guys who call seem to think we run an escort service — saying things like, 'I need a date for Saturday night, how much?'"

She said the students who do come in are mainly older students, either graduating seniors or adults who have gone back to school.

"Our service is mainly for people who are tired of going to clubs or just don't have the time to go out and find someone to date," Fleming said.

Gregg Barfield, owner and founder of the Singles Connection, said the service tries to offer a viable alternative for singles frustrated with the club scene.

The Singles Connection opened March 7 and has about 30 members so far. The service is basically for single professionals. Ages of members run between 25 and 60, Fleming said.

She said members are looking for anything from a simple companionship to a permanent relationship.

One A&M student who has joined the service is Lori Jones, a senior theater arts major.

"I'm really not thrilled about meeting guys at bars," Jones said. "People at Singles Connection are more interested in meeting someone for a relationship."

Singles Connection members meet prospective dating partners through a video selection process.

Each member fills out a personal profile sheet. The profile asks questions such as "Do you smoke?" "Do you have children?" "Would you date someone who drinks?" and "Would you date someone who has pets?"

The profile also asks members to describe the type of person they would like to meet and to describe themselves as a friend would describe them.

The profile is put in a photo album along with pictures of the member. A five minute question-and-answer video also is made of each member, Fleming said.

In the video, members talk about their worst dates, the best way a man or woman can attract their attention, the kind of movies they like to watch, their favorite things to do on a date and the qualities they look for in a dating partner.

"You can really tell a lot about a person by their video," Fleming said. "People are very honest. They don't know who is going to be watching them so they aren't embarrassed about being themselves."

Jones said she believes people are natural in their videos.

"Because you're not really meeting someone, it's easier to show your personality," she said. "And you can always redo your video if you don't like it."

Members view photographs, read profiles and watch the videos of other members as often as they want, Fleming said.

If members see someone they would like to go out with, the club sends a notification postcard to that member, explaining the member's selection as a date.

Members are allowed 36 selections during a one-year membership, but they may be selected by other members an unlimited number of times during that year.

The person selected has two weeks to view the video of the other member, Fleming said. Then, the date either is accepted or refused.

If both members agree to a date, the club will release their phone numbers.

"Everything is done on a confidential basis," Fleming said. Members don't even know each others' full names until a date is agreed upon, she said.

Barfield said people avoid personal, upfront rejection by using a video dating service.

"And if you do get picked, it's a big ego boost," he added.

Fleming said that by using video selection, a lot of the first-date nervousness is alleviated.

"This way you already know about

the person, so the first date isn't uncomfortable," she said.

One club member, Kelly, who declined to give her last name, said she likes the Singles Connection system of matching people.

"By watching the videos, you find out if you are even compatible to go out on a date with someone," she said.

By the first date, members already have a basic idea of each others' likes and dislikes, she added.

Kelly received her first date after being a member for only two days. "I got a date right off the bat," she said.

Kelly said she thinks being a member of the Singles Connection is worth spending the money it costs to join.

A membership regularly costs \$250 a year, but through April the Singles Connection is offering a special introductory price of \$185 for women and \$195 for men.

"You know people are serious about wanting to date someone because they paid at least \$250 to be members of the club," she said. "They want to meet someone who is in the same position they are in."

Barfield said he opened the Singles Connection because the video dating services in other areas had been extremely successful.

There seemed to be a need for a dating service in the Bryan-College Station area, he said.

Singles don't have many alternatives to meet people, Barfield said. A practical alternative to traditional methods is a dating service.

Barfield said women seem more reluctant than men to become members.

"The only problem I have now is getting women to join," he said. "If the women are here, I will have no problem with the men — they will naturally follow."

"The women are very curious. They just don't seem ready to spend the money and commit themselves."

Fleming said that about 200 people are on the mailing list.

"Many of them seem seriously interested in joining," she said. "I'm confident that we will have 50 members within the next two weeks."

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Charges dropped against rape suspect

SAN DIEGO, Texas (AP) — A sexual assault charge was dropped Wednesday against one of 11 men charged in the gang rape of a 19-year-old woman after he was mistakenly identified by the victim.

A Duval County official also said he expects the case to go to a grand jury next week.

Adolfo Quintanilla Jr., 28, of San Diego, was charged following the brutal March 26 attack the woman reported.

Assistant District Attorney Rodolfo Gutierrez said the woman had confused Quintanilla with another man charged in the case and misidentified him.

"The motion (to dismiss the charge) was issued yesterday, and the order was signed today," Olga Solis, clerk for Justice of the Peace Amado Garcia Jr., said Wednesday.

Quintanilla "has asked us to contact the media" so that his name is cleared, Gutierrez said Tuesday. "We're writing a letter to his employer that there are no charges against Mr. Quintanilla."

Gutierrez said he expects a grand jury to begin hearing evidence next week in the attack that has stunned the South Texas town of about 5,000.

The woman and witnesses said as many as 20 men may have been involved in the four-hour ordeal. She told investigators she was abducted in town and driven to two ranches where she was repeatedly attacked.

Gutierrez said a 14-year-old boy was implicated in the case this week, and that the woman and witnesses identified him.

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