

Searching for Soul Mates



Didn't receive rich cherry chocolates, red, red roses, or heart-emblazoned boxers last Valentine's Day? Join the crowd outside the castle: More than one million singles live in the Valley, and many are still searching for their soul-mates.

"They're looking, but are they looking for the right one- and in the right way?" asks Scottsdale's Bonnie Wills, who, as Bonnie the Matchmaker, is one of a few professionals in the Valley who personalizes matrimonial services to the needs of her clients.

Happily married for 22 years, Wills selects clients- and clients' matches- who are looking for marriage to people of similar education, age, and socio-economic backgrounds (add ethnic and religious, if requested). She does this through her social connections, through networking in organizations, and through other reputable matchmakers.

Matchmaking isn't, then, a casual dating service, she explains, "My clients are looking for life partners- not dance partners, or movie partners, or one-night-stand partners. They want to get married to the right person."

"Professional matchmaking isn't a meat market," adds Wills, who's been putting the right lids on the right pots for almost a decade. "It's a 'meet' market: It's finding the right people without going through all the wrong paces and to all the wrong places. I simply broaden the options and narrow the field."

Wills' clients are rigorously selected, her clients must fit her criteria: They are must be educated, working professional. They must be height and weight proportionate- and nonsmokers. "Smokers are just too hard to place," she says, "and I can't take money from someone if I know I will have trouble finding them dates." (She's honest, forthright, not promising to make princes or frogs or Jack the Ripper potential mates. Some matchmakers are, she says, more interested in moola than matrimony, the approving sound of the credit-card machine rather than the approval of clients.)

Finally, her clients must be focused on the task: "Focus makes for success: Knowing who and what you want, what you don't want, and staying focused on it." Matchmaking, then, is a little science, a little magic, a lot of intuition, and common sense," Wills says. "Matchmaking is also about timing and luck."

To ensure her clients are the "right stuff," she requires a three-page questionnaire, a presentable photo, a two-hour sit-down interview, a criminal-background check, date follow-ups, and a commitment to old-fashioned courting etiquette:

The questionnaire- For instance: "What are your most important attributes?" Then: "What are the ten most important attributes of the person you're seeking?" (She requires this of her clients' matches, too.)

A photo

The interview: She meets with the prospective client and listens to their spontaneous answers.

Background checks: The Valley is a boom area- good for business- but it's also a transient area:

Her job, first, is to ensure the security of her clients- then get them married.

Date Follow-Ups: Wills insists both people call her after the date, but she doesn't share information- no "he said, she said" nonsense. Wills thereby hopes to nurture realistic matrimonial possibilities and avoid wasted time when it's obvious that moonlit nights are not an option for these star-crossed lovers.

Etiquette: Clients receive a tip sheet suggesting little courtesies such as not changing plans at the last minute; underlined directives such as avoiding alcohol on the first and second dates.

Bonnie's Rule 6: "GO ON THREE DATES WITH THE PERSON BEFORE RULING THEM OUT."

Wills started a singles' dining club seven years ago in Scottsdale, but, after hearing about the horrors of dating services, she realized a need existed in Arizona for a personalized matchmaker who had the integrity to provide a quality service for hardworking professionals.

Her clients do lead very busy lives and are very selective about whom they go out with.

Wills matchmakes from experience. She married her husband, Stan, after knowing him through business. He is a tax accountant and real-estate investor. They have two high-school-aged children, with three grown children living back East- two of whom are on the way to the altar, the third with a "significant other."

The rewards for Bonnie the Matchmaker are not just financial: In just four years, Wills says she's arranged eight marriages and three engagements- and is expecting more wedding invitations.

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