Men needed for Senior Speed Dating

Women are on a waiting list, but volunteers search for men for the popular Delray Beach program

By Lois K. Solomon, Sun Sentinel

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WEST DELRAY

Come on, guys. Don't be shy.

There are hundreds of single women of a certain age waiting to meet eligible elderly gentlemen, if only they would show up for Senior Speed Dating, a weekly event at the Weisman Delray Community Center, west of Delray Beach.

The waiting list for women extends into next year. But there's no waiting list for men, who often are recruited from the center's hallways at the last minute.

"They dragged me in here with a chain," joked Len Rosendahl, 74, of Delray Beach.

The center, which caters to seniors, offers several singles groups, but Senior Speed Dating, which began in March, has become one of its most popular activities.

For $1 admission, which covers coffee and cookies, participants meet 10 members of the opposite sex. Pairs chat for seven minutes before coordinator Sherry Bernstein, a volunteer, rings a bell and asks the men to move on to the next conversation.

Speed dating, invented by a Los Angeles rabbi who sought to match Jews for marriage, has been targeted to niche groups since shortly after it became popular in the late 1990s. There are meet-ups for gay men and women, religious denominations and single parents.

But Bernstein has found that the elderly men of South Florida have been reluctant to participate, for an assortment of reasons, including the pressures of forced conversation and having to ask for phone numbers.

There also are fewer men than women to invite. South Florida's senior communities are famous for their unbalanced ratios of women to men and the butt of jokes about newly arrived or newly widowed men being pounced upon by lonely women.

The average American man lives to about age 76, while women live to 81, the U.S. Census
Bureau says.

The problem of male participation in senior singles programs is complex, said Glenda Connolly, a licensed clinical social worker at the Green Memory and Wellness Center at Florida Atlantic University. After the death of their wives, men often are deluged with social invitations. That's just the opposite of women whose husbands die, she said.

"Men are automatically popular" and may not need to look to an organized program for companionship, she said "There are others who just don't want another wife now. They don't want to have to be a caregiver again."

Some of these men are seeking younger women, said Diane Matthew, a licensed clinical social worker with Ruth Rales Jewish Family Service.

"A lot of men find themselves alone and wanting to have sex again," said Matthew, who offers a lecture called "Sexy Over 60," with frank talk about senior sex lives. "They can take Viagra or Cialis. There are many 70-year-olds who want 40-year-olds."

At the same time, many women in the demographic simply want an escort for dinner or the movies, and recoil from any "hanky-panky," Matthew said.

Still, Bernstein, a widow, believes there are many South Florida senior men who would relish an easy opportunity to meet their female peers.

She and her boyfriend, Harvey Wallet, whom she met at speed dating, work tirelessly to recruit them, visiting singles groups and bars, among other places, in Palm Beach and Broward counties. The only requirements: The men must be single, older than 60 and open-minded, she said.

"It doesn't hurt if he drives at night," Bernstein quipped. "The point is to keep active and learn to socialize."

Bernstein said she is starting to get calls from community centers seeking regular senior speed dating meet-ups. She expects to start a program in the coming months at Inverrary Country Club inLauderhill.

It was Senior Speed Dating that brought together Helen Silberlicht, 78, of Boca Raton, and Jacob Abecasses, 79, of Delray Beach, who have been dating since August. Her husband died nine months ago.

"I was very, very nervous before I went," Silberlicht said. "But when I was there, it was so easy."

Silberlicht said the seven minutes passed easily with each of the men she met, although one came with a list of irritating questions such as whether she was a caregiver to anyone in her family.

Roberta Rome, 70, said several men took her number after a recent Speed Dating gathering. But most, she said, were too old for her, including the man who said he was 96.
"It's OK, because life is all about new experiences, and living in the moment and enjoying it," Rome said. "I didn't go in with the expectation of meeting Prince Charming."

**IF YOU GO:**

**What:** Senior Speed Dating

**Where:** Weisman Delray Community Center, 7091 W. Atlantic Ave., Delray Beach

**When:** 3 p.m. Tuesdays

**Cost:** $1

**Rules:** Reservations required. Participants must be single and older than 60. Women must place their names on a waiting list. Returning men can participate every-other week. No shorts.

**More information:** Call 561-558-2100