

Accent

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Getting personal

Think of writing your personal ad as you would a grocery list. You need to mention specifics about yourself as well as those of your perfect mate. Above all else, be honest with, and about, yourself.

STAFF PHOTO BY DEB CRAM

Whether you're still seeking that special someone or have already found love, creativity and imagination are key ingredients to sparking that romantic chord in anyone's heart. Here are a few suggestions:

- Surprises always catch people off guard and, in romance, spontaneity is a good thing.
- Flowers may die but they will never grow old. They are the timeless gift. Women, as well as men, can give flowers. Placing flowers in odd places, such as in a briefcase, lunch

bag or car, can say more than any other gift.

- Get out your crayons and markers, or even a computer, and start creating a card. Homemade cards show off your artistic ability, while also letting you tell your loved one exactly what you feel. Women really don't care if it's a Hallmark card — as long as it's from you.

- Make copies of your favorite photographs and use them to create a collage. Use magazine clippings to add vibrant color and unique phrases to your work of art.

- If you and your partner are both heavy Internet users, and are on at the same time, chat up some romance while no one is looking. Or send e-mail poetry. Everyone loves to get mail.

Although these romance tips may work well today, they can be used any day of the year. Love isn't just something you celebrate one day of the year and then forget about.

And when you reveal your romantic side when it's not expected of you, it will show them you really care.

— Compiled by Kiana Minkle

On Valentine's Day, personal ads offer hope for singles, ideas for the already-hitched

By KIANA MINKLE
STAFF WRITER

In newspapers across the country, single white females are searching for sensitive, romantic, single white males, who enjoy the outdoors, traveling, dining out and movies.

And they're finding them, thanks to personal ads.

Many people don't think personal ads are for them. They have a set idea of who uses them, and think they are unsafe. Some may think it's not "normal" to date that way.

But that's not necessarily true. There's a growing number of people who submit personals who just don't have the time or patience to deal with the people they have been meeting. They say they want to meet new people, who have the qualities they desire.

So an easy alternative is to place a personal ad in the paper. It's free. It's easy. You don't have to be a novelist to write them. And the only ones who will know you've submitted one are those who respond to the ad.

Seacoast Newspapers has a new personal column called Dating Connections that started last month. You may have seen it in Spotlight magazine, or even in today's paper (page E14) already. It also printed Tuesdays in the Hampton Union, Exeter News-Letter and the Portsmouth Herald.

Newspaper Voice Services Inc., the company responsible for this new column, has been providing personals to papers across the country for 10 years. When it first started out, only 25 newspapers carried the column, and now it boasts more than 300, said Jennifer Patterson, publisher relations coordinator for Newspaper Voice Services Inc.

Kristi Young, marketing manager for Seacoast Newspapers, said the newspaper company made the move in an effort to consolidate the personals to one service. Formerly the Herald used a different personals company than its sister papers.

"We chose this company because it delivers a better product to our readers," she said.

Here's how it works: Write a description of yourself and the kind of person you're looking for, using 20 words or less. Call 1-800-434-8073 to record your ad in Dating Connections for free. You may want to record a voice greeting as well, with additional information about yourself. Then, once a week, you can call the same number and listen to your responses for free.

Responding to an ad is where the cost — \$1.99 per minute — factors in. To respond to an ad, you must call 1-900-370-3322.

Marketing promotions and giveaways run with Dating Connections so that people who submit ads can also win prizes. Such promotions include The Great American Kiss-Off and Bahamarama.

And personal ads are not only limited to newspapers anymore. Dating Connections is also online at www.seacoastonline.com (click on Dating Connection). By using the computers, Internet users can now meet people in the

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Love between the lines

Personals from Page E1

same fashion. Instead of phone calls, e-mails are exchanged.

'We found our soulmates'

Placing 10,000 new ads each week in newspapers across the country, Newspaper Voice Services Inc. has received more than 6,000 testimonials from couples who have met and formed lasting relationships with others, said Patterson.

Deborah Jackson, who used Dateline, the column in her local newspaper, wrote about her experience, and how after meeting a few guys she finally found the one she wanted to marry. After just three dates, they were engaged.

"I admit I was nervous and skeptical when I first started my Dateline Membership, but I soon found out that everyone is very busy in their lives and they really just want someone to share it with. We thank you from the bottom of our very joyful hearts. We have each found our soulmate," wrote Jackson.

Two couples from Chicago also met through Dateline and are planning weddings after placing and answering a personal ad.

Around 300 ads run each week in Seacoast Newspapers, depending on the promotions and the number of people who place ads. Near holidays, such as Christmas and Valentine's Day, more people are likely to submit ads.

Interestingly enough, says Patterson, while the majority of personal ads are usually written by men, those listed in Seacoast newspapers are about even.

Writing personals

A personal ad is basically a grocery list for someone you would like to date. If you went to the store, and wanted to buy eggs and bread, you would have to know what kind of eggs and bread and which brands. The

same goes for personals. If you want someone who likes bowling and Harley's, and who doesn't smoke, then say so. People can't read your mind, especially when they don't know you.

Safety tips

- Meet in a public place
- Tell a friend or family member where you're going and call them when you get home.
- Never reveal too much personal information until you know the other person well.
- Use separate cars.
- Don't trust anyone until you've met a few times.
- Don't give out your home or office address.

Getting personal on the big screen

Personal ad dating has appeared in many movies over the years. The most well-known is probably "Desperately Seeking Susan," with Madonna and Rosanna Arquette, where a personal ad titled Desperately Seeking Susan catches the attention of a New Jersey housewife, and after getting amnesia, she believes she is Susan. Then there was "Single White Female" in 1992, which is a darker, psycho twist on answering classified ads. Other lesser-known films involving personal ads are The Personals (1983), Personals (1990) and Perfect Match (1988).

When writing personal ads, keep these tips in mind: be as specific as possible, include your age or age group, be honest, keep it short and write things you would want to read in other ads.

A sure-fire way to write a great ad is in the words you choose. Instead of saying you like music and movies, tell a specific movie or musician

that you like. Including your zodiac sign and an odd habit you have may entice someone to respond as well. Usually out-of-the-ordinary specifics will attract attention and ultimately more responses than the normal generic ad.

"The more creative the ad, the more response it receives," said Patterson.

Sometimes revealing too much information about yourself can be just as damaging as too little, though. Just write what you think people should know.

There's no guarantee that you'll get a response to your ad, but the odds are for rather than against you if you write an ad that is both unique and honest.

And if you're still having trouble, there are many books on the market that can help you write the best personal ad.

First impressions

As soon as you meet someone, you have an opinion of them. You like them or you don't like them. And it is all decided the first few minutes that you meet them. So it is important to make a good first impression.

A good way to win over any woman would be to bring either one flower or many to the first meeting. Sometimes a single rose does wonders.

Some people say they think personal ads are inappropriate for the newspaper. But Patterson says the service Newspaper Voice Services provides is very professional. All ads are edited for content before they are printed in the paper.

For those who don't think personals should exist, consider this: If there were no personals, millions of shy Americans, who don't frequent the traditional meeting spots and who just want to meet a nice person, would be denied the opportunity to confidentially search the population for that special someone. And who are we to deny them a chance for happiness?