

# CAREERS



## Matchmaking goes modern

**Linda Miller interviews people looking seriously for love and marriage and introduces a selection of couples to each other. Iris Winston writes.**

Once upon a time, a handsome stranger knocked on the door of a thatched cottage in the woods. The beautiful golden-haired maiden en had been waiting for this moment. She knew at once that the love of her life stood before her and that they would live happily ever after. Yeah, right!

“The reality is that nobody is going to come knocking,” says Linda Miller, owner of Misty River Introductions. Therefore, anyone seeking a life partner must do more than dream.

But, she says, many people do not have a broad social network, particularly if they are new to Ottawa. And, after a busy day in a demanding job and, perhaps, equally heavy domestic responsibilities as a single parent or caring for an infirm relative, entering or re-entering the dating game without support can be daunting.

It makes sense to take the legwork out of the search for a compatible partner. This is what Ms. Miller, who describes herself as a traditional matchmaker, has done for her clients for the last decade.

“Single adults looking for a long-term relationship are put in contact with people that meet their criteria, people that they would not meet through their regular circle of friends,” she says. “Then all they have to worry about is the chemistry”

And, that, says 43-year-old Clifford, one of Misty River’s successfully matched clients, happened very quickly for him. On his second date through the matchmaking service, he met his future wife. The couple will marry at the end of the year.

“The older you are, the harder it is to meet people who don’t carry baggage,” he points out, adding that he “was very happy with the way that Misty River does things.”

Ms. Miller meets all potential clients. “I look to see if they meet our existing demographic. I don’t want to take somebody on and then wait for people that they might like and who might like them.”

In Ottawa, she says, the client group tends to be a “predominantly fairly affluent, educated, active, non-smoking and health conscious. In Toronto it is a much more mixed bag with totally different socio-economics.”

Both client bases are unlike her original market in Manitoba, where she began her career as a matchmaker in 1993.

“Originally, I thought my and has a database of more niche would be the rural market says Ms. Miller. “I was, able to relate to farmers and rural people because that was my own background and I always thought that that it was difficult for people in the country to meet one another ..../

because they are so geographically isolated.”

In less than two years, she had built up a thriving business, which she sold to one of her former successfully matched clients, when she moved to Ontario with her husband.

Shortly afterwards, she started up Misty River Introductions. She used her credit card to cover the initial \$800 she spent on advertising and promotional materials. For the first three years, she says, “I made just enough to cover my operating expenses each month. I could keep my head above water but made absolutely no money. I invested three years to develop a large enough database, so that I could charge enough to make a living.”

By this time, says Ms. Miller, she had overcome early missteps in advertising placement and purchasing software programs that did not meet her company’s needs. “Then, I started to get a ton of word-of-mouth business and the company just took off.”

Misty River Introductions has now expanded to a staff of eight. The service operates across Ontario and in Montreal and has a database of more than 8,000 clients. Ms. Miller, now single, is also considering the possibility of franchising the operation.

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**Linda Miller**

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The marketplace has changed considerably over the years, she says. “Print personals, such as RSVP ads, and the expansion of the Internet as a contact point gave the Misty River style initial jolts, but the major lasting effect was positive. “The Internet has made us so much more socially acceptable,” says Ms. Miller. “Now, we’re like being introduced by the parents. It’s become very respectable to go to a match maker and we’re really a higher-end kind of service. Most of our clients are busy professionals who don’t have time to go and meet 100 people. We do the pre-selection.”

Clients, who are required to complete detailed application forms, meet up to seven potential partners for the \$650 registration fee, which Ms. Miller describes as “an investment in the future, the rest of their lives.” They also have unlimited telephone and e-mail contact with as many people as they wish. The clock starts ticking on the seven with face-to-face meetings only.

On average, clients find a match by their third meeting, says Ms. Miller. It is also the break-even point for the business.

“We don’t just punch names into a database. We spend a lot of time on each file. I’m not guaranteeing love, but I do guarantee that clients will meet seven people close to the criteria they are looking for.”

Misty River Introductions is based in Carleton Place. The telephone number is (613) 257-3531. Other numbers are: Toronto: (416) 777-6302; Montreal:(514) 879-0573; and fax: (613) 257-3630.

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