

Charlotte Magazine  
February 1, 2008

## Best Places to Meet People

He thought she was very attractive. She thought he was clean cut and a gentleman.

When he opened the door to the restaurant for her that evening several months ago, he did it out of instinct. Kevin might have had an idea that she was his date but couldn't have known that for sure. They were supposed to meet at the hostess stand. Cindy thought this could be him, as she knew he had red hair. Other than that, they had yet to say a word to each other.

The date was arranged by Laurie Berzack, whose Chai Expectations is one of the South's only dedicated Jewish matchmaking services. ("Chai," pronounced with a hard consonant, isn't a trendy tea from Starbucks but the Hebrew word for life.) Her service is the professional version of what Jewish mothers do as a hobby.

"I'm a great networker," says Berzack, who has a master's degree in social work. "It's always been a passion to bring people together," whether that's meant with jobs or each other.

Berzack is clear that this isn't a dating service. Being Jewish is a must, as is being serious about commitment. "I can't take everyone because they're not all committed to getting married."

The upfront cost can range from \$750 to \$5,000, depending upon the criteria, with a success fee that's negotiated. Success is based on a benchmark such as getting engaged, or being together for at least a year.

Kevin, thirty-three, and Cindy, thirty-two, met in April and are getting closer. He works in the motor sports business and she's a speech pathologist. It was Cindy's third introduction through Berzack, his first. They most likely would never have met another way.

"When I first moved here, I was working a lot. I figured it was a good way to meet people," says Kevin. "I'm not the kind of person who's going to pick up a girl in a bar. It's harder to meet people at my age."

"For being in business and being very busy, it was worth it to me. I'm at the point in my life when I want to get married and be with somebody. I'm a shy

person so it's hard for me to meet people. When I started this, I never thought in a million years that the first person she set me up with would be someone that I would be with for the last seven months."

"I've dated Jewish and non-Jewish, and I decided to find somebody Jewish," says Cindy.

She had tried JDate, a popular Jewish matchmaking Web site, and other services with no results. Her mother pointed out a newspaper article about Chai Expectations, several times in fact, but it was her sister who eventually pushed her to try it. She's glad she did and would definitely recommend it.

"It cuts out a lot of the games, you know. I find, too, because I'm busy [that] it's hard to find time to go out and meet people."

As you read this, Kevin and Cindy are approaching a year together, getting to that point where Berzack measures success. Her reward will be in the bank and in the heart.

To Berzack, the whole thing is simple. "I love the idea of being in love."

And Kevin's mother is very happy.