

JILL SAGERS-WJANGCO FOR REDEYE

Dan Earls (right) says he found a great guy with the local matchmaking service In Good Company.

Investing in a relationship

In Good Company hooks people up by playing matchmaker with its members. How it works:

- Potential members interview with IGC's matchmakers for free, then decide if they want to buy a membership.
- The interview lasts about an hour and is as personal as a member is willing to make it.
- Membership costs \$750 for 12 months, which guarantees you four sessions with a matchmaker and 12 introductions. A nine-month membership is \$650 and guarantees three matchmaker sessions and nine introductions. A six-month membership costs \$550 and guarantees two matchmaker sessions and six introductions.
- After you join, IGC calls you to talk about your matches. They describe your date's looks, job, hobbies and interests. If you decide to meet up, the company sets up your date for you. They'll make reservations or, if you give them your credit card number, they'll order tickets for you.
- You don't have to bring a yellow rose so your date can identify you. IGC partners with 20 local restaurants, including Nine, Catch 35 and Adobo Grill, to provide an accepting environment for gay and lesbian dates. You can tell the hostess, "I'm with IGC," and she'll seat you with your date.
- Date activities vary from brunch, lunch, and drinks after work to tennis and racquet ball matches, wine tastings or cooking classes.
- Setting up a second date is up to members, but clients are asked to fill out a date evaluation form after each outing. Matchmakers give members a three-month consultation to talk about how things are going and give feedback.
- If you find a keeper, you can put your membership on hold for up to a year. If things don't work out, you can reactivate the membership and start dating again. —M.C.

COVERSTORY

MAN LANDERS

Local matchmakers give gay community chance to find serious relationships

By Maegan Carberry
RedEye

Joey Zimmerman has seen the guys on *match.com*, and he's not impressed. The 23-year-old finance student at Loyola University is looking for a serious relationship, not just another quickie romance.

"With the gay scene," he said, "it's very hookup oriented."

The gay bars near him are no better, he said. "I went out in Boystown last week. Three people touched my private parts," he said.

"If I find a guy I want to be with, I'm not going to find him at a place like that. I hope not."

Determined to find Mr. Right, Zimmerman became a member of In Good Company, a new Chicago-based matchmaking service geared toward the gay and lesbian community. The service launched in June and now has more than 200 clients, according to founder and president Bill Rossi.

Members of IGC meet with one of the company's three matchmakers to talk about themselves and what they are looking for in a mate, Rossi said. The matchmaker then sets up introductions for members who fit each other's criteria.

"I knew this community needed a better way to meet people. I thought, 'Let's do this.'"
—Bill Rossi
In Good Company founder and president

Rossi, who is gay, said he understands how hard it is to meet quality people who want to be in relationships.

"In the hetero community, if a guy sees a girl at Jewel and he finds her attractive, he can walk up to her and carry on a conversation," Rossi said, adding that the same is not true for a gay man or woman. "If you talk to [someone], you take the chance that he'll be offended and get physical with you. It's an added roadblock in your way."

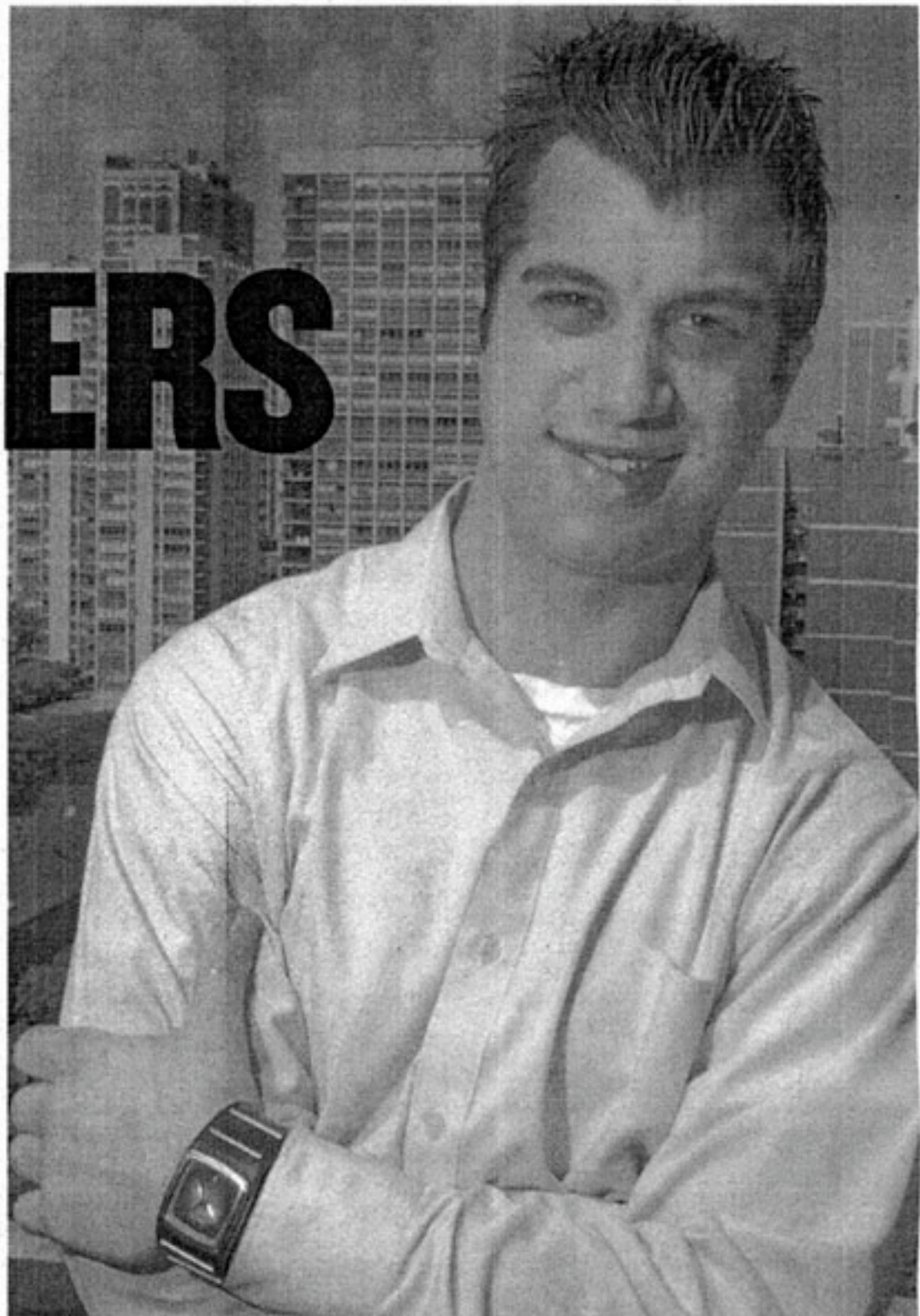
"I knew this community needed a better way to meet people. I thought, 'Let's do this.'"

It seems like a better way to Zimmerman, who has been on three dates through IGC so far. He said they went well. Although he hasn't clicked with anyone yet, he feels confident that the \$750 he spent on his one-year membership, which guarantees him 12 dates, will prove more productive than searching for a guy online or cruising the bar circuit.

"It's a lot of money, but it's going to filter out all the people who are not serious about me," he said.

Rossi acknowledged that the membership fee is hefty but argued that a person spending \$100 a weekend at bars has dropped about \$800 in two months.

Memberships also can be put on hold for up to a year if a match is made, Rossi said.



MOLAN WELLS FOR REDEYE

Determined to find Mr. Right, Joey Zimmerman became a member of In Good Company, a matchmaking service.

For some members, the service has paid off.

Dan Earls, a 48-year-old architect, found a great guy on his second date and has put his membership on hold. Earls liked Keith, a 47-year-old teacher, so much that their first date lasted nine hours.

"I was shocked that it worked out so well," Earls said. "It seems like we've known each other so much longer."

Earls and Keith, who asked that his last name not be used because he doesn't want his employer to know he is gay, have been spending a lot of time together.

"He's a really sincere person who is kind and considerate of me," Earls said of Keith. "The good thing about IGC is that it's about people who are serious about what they want to do."

Not all matches work out the way Earls' did, said IGC matchmaker Emily Fry, who coordinated weddings for 10 years before joining the company.

"You can't predict chemistry," she said. "I wish I could."

She tries to find what people have in common to determine how their personalities will mesh, just as she has previously when setting up her friends, she said.

When meeting with a new client, Fry said she tries to get a sense of who they are and what they want from a partner. She asks clients basic questions about what they'd like in a partner: height, weight, hair color. She also tries to go deeper, asking about clients' families, their jobs and their friends.

"Obviously, I can't fully know them in an hour," she said, but she added that she can get a sense of how they'll match up with her other clients.

"When the person is talking, other [clients] will pop into my head," she said. "Sometimes it takes me an hour to match somebody sometimes it takes 10 minutes."

Fry said she wants to make as many fairy-tale endings possible for her clients. "I couldn't ask for a better occupation than bringing people together."

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