

Seniors

Looking for LOVE online



STAFF PHOTO BY MIKE ADASKAVEG
CYBER-CUPID: Bea Kenney of Quincy says meeting people on the Internet takes away the awkwardness of setting up dates.

More elders search for companionship through the Internet

"At this stage of life, I need a companion on the path, a real 'life partner' whose vision, values and search for personal meaning mirror mine, so that when we sing together, we sing in harmony. I have a lot to share, and need to find someone who realizes it takes more than material things to create riches and rewards in one's life... I'm hoping to find one special woman who brings (a) smile to my face whenever she walks into a room."

— A Match.com member profile by worthmore

By CARA NISSMAN

After his sizzling four-month relationship fizzled recently, Paul Steven Stone decided to start searching for a new companion who could appreciate that he was "worth more" than a fling.

Rather than being set up by friends or attending arranged activities, he embarked on a more modern quest — using online dating services, including Match.com and JDate.com (for Jewish singles).

"I used to go to dances, but they're so hit-and-miss," said Stone, 56, of Cambridge. "You have to be somebody else in that environment. You have to be 'on.' I tried one personal ad and re-

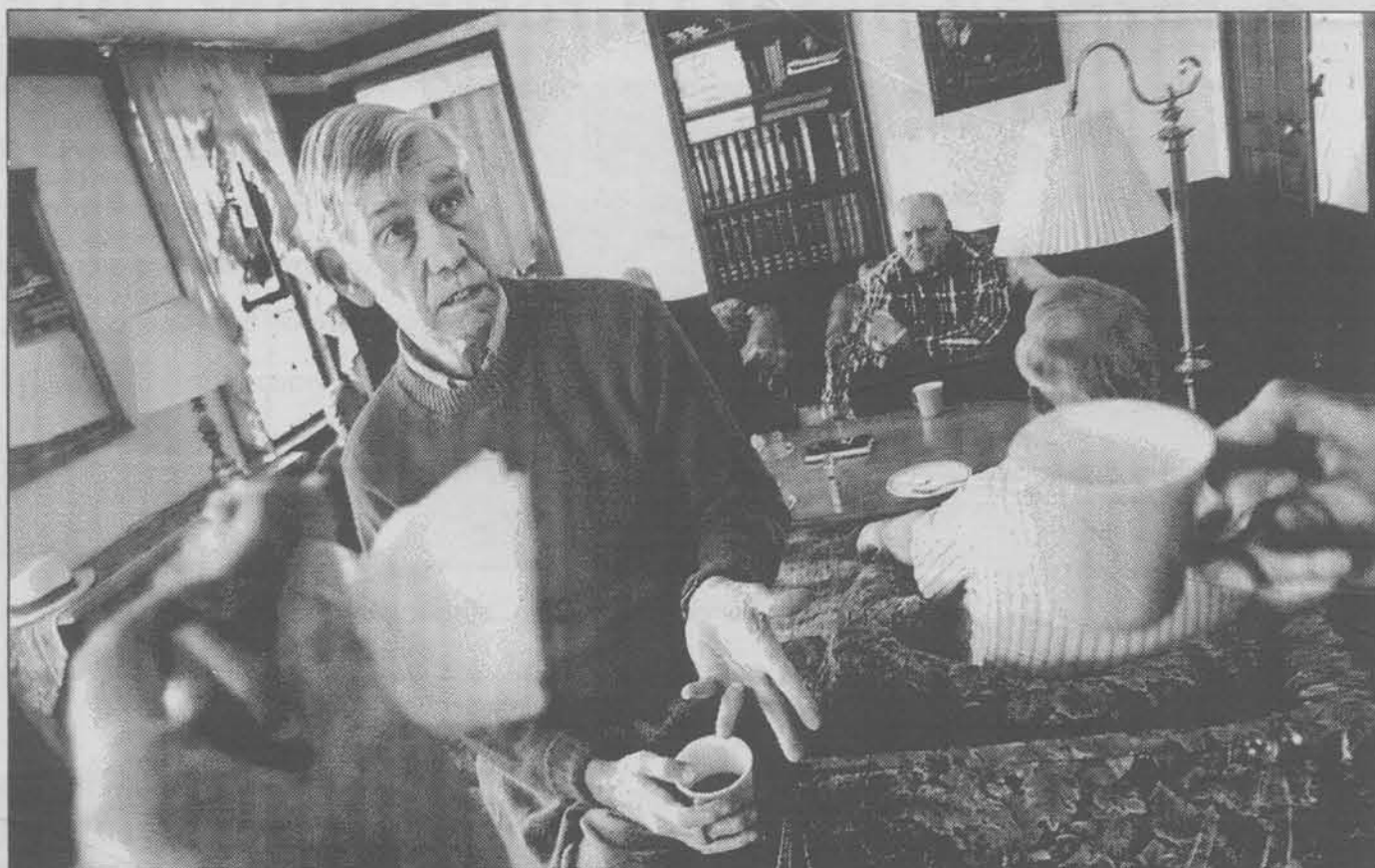
ceived something like 100 responses, but you get so little information.

"Nothing gives you the scope and immediacy of the Internet," he continued. "You get to see pictures. You can be very clear about what you're looking for. It's very easy to reach out to a number of women who seem appropriate."

Forget Saturday sock hops at the local VFW. Stone's just one of more than 80,000 baby boomers and seniors nationwide logging on to look for love later in life, according to dating site Match.com.

"People aged 50 and older are one of the fastest growing groups of online dating service

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STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GOLDMAN
COFFEE TALK: Jim McAllister of Peabody chats at a meeting of the Alan Watts Fellowship. The group, mostly comprised of senior citizens, meets monthly for a potluck brunch, followed by a tape playing and discussion of philosopher Alan Watts.

Web sites replace old-fashioned matchmakers

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subscribers," said Ron Geraci, relationships editor of AARP The Magazine.

Indeed, 43 percent of those 55 and older believe it's possible to fall in love with someone they meet online, according to Match.com, which features the profiles of nearly 2,000 Boston area people age 60 and older.

"We've seen more than 60 percent growth in (usage by) the senior population," said Trish McDermott, Match.com's vice president of romance and communications. "People who may not have much access to the outside world now have the ability to reach out from home."

The stigma once attached to the Internet doesn't faze folks now in the later half of their lives.

"People who are in their 50s and 60s now are people who grew up in the '60s," said Geraci. "They've had a variety of experiences in their lifetimes, so they're bringing a sense of adventure into their 50s and 60s. They still feel vital and they want to

date if they're single."

Geraci said the Internet's anonymity draws many mature folks.

"It's very good for people who haven't dated for 20 or 30 years because it lets people put their pinky toe into being social and interact with people in a safe environment," he said. "You don't have to meet people face-to-face."

Bea Kenney has found a few dates using Internet services. She said she appreciates sites such as Sassy Seniors.com and Match.com because they eliminate the awkwardness associated with setting up dates.

"I met somebody at church once two years ago," said Kenney, 67, of Quincy. "But there's the uncertainty, 'Is he interested in me or not? How do I show him I'm interested?' I like using the Internet because you're declaring you want to date. There's no guessing."

People may be upfront about wanting to date, but that doesn't mean folks are always truthful about themselves.

"I chatted with one woman and when she asked me about my height

and I told her I was 5 foot 10, he said, 'Are you sure?'" said Eli Post, 64, of Cambridge. "Another man she went out with had said he was 5 foot 7 and it turned out that he barely cleared 5 feet! That was hilarious."

Post has used online services for only about a month, but he already recognizes some recurring themes.

"There are a lot of buzz words," he said. "Women say they're fit, energetic, fun. But that says nothing. I'm drawn to profiles where there's more specificity."

And just because you're specific about what you're looking for doesn't mean prospective dates will take the hint, said Post.

"I made it clear I live in Cambridge, Mass., and half of the women who responded were from differ-

ent places. I got one e-mail from England," he said. "I don't need a penpal."

The Internet can prove useful in other ways when it comes to seniors socializing. Jim Yost enjoys posting activities, such as brunches and lectures, at Singlesclub.org. Often more women than men attend.

"I like discussions," said Yost, 63, of Belmont. "Sometimes I'll post, 'Let's all gather at Victoria Station in Burlington for dinner.'"

SeniorNet, although not intended to play Cupid for mature couples, has given many seniors a place to express themselves and find mates with similar interests, including books, travel and philosophy.

"We have 600 discussion groups," said Ann Wrixon, president of SeniorNet (www.seniornet.org). "A lot

of people meet online and end up getting married. It got to be so many that we don't keep track of it anymore."

Yet for seniors wary of the Web, there are many other methods for finding matches — as long as seniors are emotionally ready to share their lives with new loves, said author Edith Ankersmit Kemp.

"One of the best ways to meet someone is to do things you're interested in," said Kemp, 74, co-author with husband Jerrold, 81, of "Older Couples: New Romances" (Celestial Arts, \$14.95). The Kemps met through friends in 1996 after they had dealt with grieving for their late spouses. "There are so many kinds of groups. People can be like teenagers and hang out in groups before they start dating."

Cupid shoots arrows in many places

Seniors have countless methods from which to choose when seeking somebody special:

- High school and college alumni magazines and functions.
- Online matchmakers, including Sassy Seniors.com and SeniorsCircle.com.
- Senior centers and singles, activity and church groups, including South Shore Singles in Abington at 781-331-0021.
- Print personal ads and dating services, including Gentlepeople at 617-492-1200.
- Church, health club, writer's or reader's groups.
- Trips or cruises.
- Volunteer activities.
- Internet discussion groups on senior-gear Web sites, such as SeniorNet (www.seniornet.org) or ThirdAge (www.thirdage.com).

— CARA NISSMAN

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