



No jerks allowed: Course to help singles find compatible partners

Thursday, April 08, 2010

By Jennifer Goga
Post-Gazette Staff

Many single adults say it's tough to find a healthy, long-term relationship in today's culture. Some point to difficult economic times, busy work schedules or a perceived shortage of single adults as the reason that dating is more challenging in 2010.

Ellen Heriger, of Moon, believes cultural diversification also has contributed to the problem. Ms. Heriger, 59, is a workshop coordinator for TWOgether Pittsburgh, a coalition of nonprofit agencies and others that works to promote healthy relationships and marriage.

"In the not-too-distant past, people clustered around neighborhoods based on nationality, thus [single adults] shared similar family values, traditions and cultural practices ... there was a 'built-in' compatibility," Ms. Heriger said.

Now, she said, singles must work harder to find compatible partners.

Ms. Heriger will moderate a five-week course titled "How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk" this month at Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church. The curriculum was developed by psychologist John Van Epp and is based on his book, "How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk."

The classes emphasize building knowledge and intimacy through talk, togetherness and time.

"If a relationship grew online, that would be lacking the togetherness," Ms. Heriger said. "It takes time to see patterns in your partner, time spent together in a variety of settings."

Terry Oberst, of Green Tree, plans to attend. She wants to get a new perspective on dating and learn to avoid common pitfalls.

Ms. Oberst, 38, is a special education teacher at Sunnyside Elementary in the Pittsburgh Public School District. She said she would stop short of calling any former boyfriends "jerks" but acknowledged none of her previous relationships have resulted in marriage.

"I think we can all agree that love is blind, but this class is designed to help singles recognize the red flags," Ms. Heriger said.

The course is funded entirely by TWOgether Pittsburgh, a coalition that includes Family Guidance Inc. as the lead agency, along with the Center for Urban Biblical Ministry, the National Fatherhood Initiative, the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, Smith Brothers Advertising and others.

In September 2006, TWOgether Pittsburgh received a five-year federal grant totaling \$8.35 million to provide education that promotes marriage and healthy relationships.

"How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk" will be offered from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesdays, April 28 through May 26, at Wallace Memorial Presbyterian Church, Green Tree. Classes are free and include a light meal. Registration is required by April 21. Contact Ellen Heriger at eheriger@wallacememorial.org.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10098/1048612-55.stm#ixzz0kd1dNy6B>