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Matchmaker helps her clients keep their eyes on what they prize

All out for love and money

By Jerd Smith
News Staff Writer

Bon Jour Inc. is Michele Fields' labor of love.

The 43-year-old matchmaker has spent much of the past 10 years introducing eligible women to eligible men — for a fee, of course.

Fields worked as a legal secretary before starting her dating service. A decade later, she has a small, carefully chosen clientele, a proven track record and plenty of enthusiasm for her work.

"I really think it's my calling," she says.

Bon Jour Inc. isn't headed for the Fortune 500. "I'm not out to make \$100,000 a year," says Fields, preferring to keep her business small and her matchmaking endeavors focused and personal.

The secret to her success, beyond knowing each of her 250 clients in great detail, is keeping overhead to a minimum. She operates a small home office, doesn't advertise and has no employees. "Plus, I have no vices, and I am very, very good

with money," she says.

Fields relies almost exclusively on word-of-mouth referrals and asks clients to fill out a three-page questionnaire. "I'm not trying to throw people together. I deal in quality," she says, "not quantity."



Fields

Years of helping single friends connect persuaded Fields to strike out as a professional matchmaker in 1989. She endured by breaking most of the rules of larger services. She uses no videos and no computerized matching. There are no Friday night mixers.

Her fee structure is simple: a one-time, \$700 upfront fee, which includes a two- to three-hour in-depth interview and \$35 for every introduction.

Clients, shy about acknowledging that they use a dating service, nonetheless say Fields' success is linked to her personal touch and to the screening process she uses when

selecting clients.

"She won't take just anyone," says Phil, a 52-year-old inventor who has been working with Fields for about a year.

Years of seeing men and women in dating action have given Fields an expert's perspective on the battle of the sexes, and she has some decidedly practical views about why men and women do and don't connect.

Men too often are, well, superficial. "They're totally focused on 'is she young, is she good looking, is she thin.' "

Women, she says, often insist on playing by rules that simply don't work. Call him back, she advises, and call him back fast.

What would help men and women most in their search for partners is a solid dose of realism.

"Some women will call me and say they will only date men who are 6 feet 2 inches and make \$250,000. That's tough. I mean seriously. Look around in the grocery store. There aren't that many out there."