

Speakeasy provides alternative to the bar scene

Singles club looking for members as young as 18

Sunday February 24, 2002

By Sandy Wells
STAFF WRITER

After months of haunting bars in their search for companionship and renewed self-esteem, most newly single people yearn for a better way to get back in the social swim.

Speakeasy Singles could be just the ticket.

Formed in 1985 as a social and support organization for those who are divorced, widowed or legally separated, the group holds 13 dances each year, including one on New Year's Eve. Members also gather for lasagna parties, card parties, dance lessons, nature walks, bowling, volleyball and other activities.

"It's an outlet that gives them something social to do, to keep them active physically and emotionally," said Carolyn Shott, membership chairman. "Single people need an alternative to the bar scene, places where they can really talk and get to know each other so it's not like a meat market thing."

A bookkeeper at Sacred Heart Church, Shott first joined 16 years ago after her marriage of 26 years ended in divorce.

"I spent two years doing nothing," she said. "My brother talked me into joining. It kind of turned my life around. You meet new friends without having to be dating someone. You may meet someone there to date, and you may not, but you meet lots of friends."

Linda Geronilla, a Charleston psychologist, started the group after listening to a divorced friend complain about the bar scene. "I had a therapist friend who had

started a group in California called Speakeasy,” Geronilla said. “I called him up and told him we wanted to copy him. He blessed me and away it went.”

A large newspaper article about the Speakeasy concept attracted considerable interest, she said. “We had 100 people at the first meeting, so there was obviously a real need. More than 60 percent of the population is divorced,” she added, “and our state has one of the highest divorce rates, so the need is there.”

Speakeasy Singles honored Geronilla and Carolyn Stevens, the divorced friend who inspired the group, during the organization’s 15th anniversary in 2000.

Geronilla said the therapist who came up with the Speakeasy name wanted a catchy title and thought Speakeasy would carry many different meanings, among them the admonition to speak easy, to be gentle and not aggressive.

At the time she formed the group, Geronilla was involved in “reality therapy,” a concept entwined with the goals of Speakeasy Singles. “Reality therapy is based on four basic needs,” she said. “The first is the need for love and belonging. When you are divorced, the love is shattered, but we still need belonging. Speakeasy provides that kind of socialization.

“The second need is to feel empowered, significant, confident, worthwhile.

“The third need is to have fun. That’s why Speakeasy has fun activities. Singles shouldn’t just sit home and look at the walls. That can be really deadly. People get depressed when they’re by themselves.

“The fourth need is for freedom. Speakeasy members can pick and choose what they want to do. There’s no obligation to do this or that.”

The club isn’t something you join for the rest of your life, she said. “You can go the rest of your life if you want to, but it basically serves a function.”

Many people who meet through Speakeasy Singles end up getting married, “but they aren’t outcasts gone forever,” she said. Married “graduates” maintain ties with Speakeasy members during “Mingles” meetings for both married and single people.

Many Speakeasy members also participate in Rebuilders, a divorce recovery group sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church. “We’re more recreational,” Geronilla said. “Rebuilders is more for the spiritual and emotional side of it.”

About 110 members belong to the Speakeasy group now, said activities chairman Terri Williamson. Ages range from 21 into the 70s.

“The majority are in their 40s and up,” she said. “We need some younger people. We want to take them as young as 18.”

Along with social activities, the organization plans to set up weekly discussion groups with a psychiatrist and a minister.

For additional information, call Carolyn Shott, 949-2283.

Back to Gazette-Mail

© Copyright 2003 Sunday Gazette-Mail