

CULTURE

Seasoned greetings

Cruise Control connects lesbians 36 and older

BY PAT YOUNG

Cruise Control isn't just something you set on your car when you're driving along Interstate 5. It has a whole new meaning, thanks to Pauline Miriam. Now when you think of Cruise Control, you can exit off I-5 to speed dating, disco dances, wine tasting parties, singles events and anything else she can think of to entertain lesbians 36 and older.

It all started with a divorce. After a long-term relationship, Miriam suddenly found herself single. When she was ready to date again, she thought the resources for "seasoned" lesbians were becoming more and more limited.

"Since it was time for me to date and I wanted to do speed dating for lesbians, I decided that I would do speed dating for lesbians," she says with a chuckle.

With more than 30 years of volunteer activism and organizational skills behind her, Miriam created what she cheekily refers to as her retirement fund because "Bush isn't going to save me with Social Security."

Cruise Control is her small business. But it is much more than that. It is a way for her to give back to the community—something she strongly believes in. She does this in her spare time while maintaining a full-time job as a medical transcriptionist.

In April 2004, she put together Cruise Control's first speed dating event, which was a chance for single lesbians to meet, talk for eight minutes and then move on to the next woman. Miriam, who describes herself as an East Coast Jewish girl who loves talking, really enjoyed the speed dating but noticed waning interest after a few events. So she thought about doing an old-fashioned disco dance—

but in the afternoon.

"In Philadelphia during the 1980s, we had Ladies for the '80s," she says. These Sunday afternoon "tea dances" are very common on the East Coast, according to Miriam.

An afternoon disco dance in Portland called Hot Flash seemed like a good idea. Besides, there are advantages to the early hours; some women might not want to stay up late, and afternoons are down times at most bars.

Miriam went to Embers to talk with the owners. She admits one of them was a bit skeptical, saying: "You think you are going to get these women to come in and pay \$7? And how many women did you say you were expecting?"

She recalls: "They put a bit of the fear of God in me. But I did it."

More than 200 lesbians attended the first event. The dance during Portland Pride drew more than 300.

Women come to the events for a variety

of reasons. Leeanna Warnecke, 50, attended a dance last month for the first time. "I'm here because I'm a lesbian and I'm going to check out some women," she laughs. "I've been single for too long." She was there with a few friends and plans to attend other Cruise Control events.



Pauline Miriam (with furry friend Rebecca) created Cruise Control as a way for her to give back to the community.

Carol Brownlow loves to dance and likes the fact that the dances are smoke-free. "I would really encourage older women to come to this, because sometimes they go to dances and younger kids are there and we feel out of place, but with this everybody is older and it's comfortable."

Miriam set up Cruise Control for lesbians 36 and older, but she won't discriminate if younger women attend. After all, she says, some younger women like older women.

She chose the age of 36 because of Judaic implications: Every letter in Judaism has an associated number. The word for "life" is "chai." The letters add up to 18. "You give a double blessing of life when you give 36, and so it is lesbians 36 and over," explains Miriam.

With a mailing list of 500 and growing, she has sent out surveys to determine what women want, and she tries to meet those needs, which she lists on her website. Miriam says her biggest reward for doing Cruise Control is the thanks she receives from so many women, some of whom come up to her in tears. "There is such a tremendous need for women to go out and have fun." ■

For more information about CRUISE CONTROL visit www.cruisecontrolpdx.com.

PAT YOUNG is a Portland free-lance writer and gay and lesbian historian.

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