

**SAKE TO ME**

For some singles, life is not all about the hookup. Enter the long list of “activity partner” events. **Social Circles** has been around in NYC since 1998, and it organizes about 60 activities every month, at which city dwellers can meet like-minded friends. SC doesn’t market itself as a singles’ service, but even founding partner Karenne Rossi is realistic about the motivations of the group’s 2,200 members: “To say that people don’t join Social Circles because they’re looking for love would be silly,” she says, adding that interviews with prospective clients help make sure they’re not using the events as a meat market. Still, there was quite a bit of intra-SC gossip at the s’mores schmooze I attended at the new DT UT café in the East Village—but also quite a shortage of men. Romantic potential continued to elude me (again, guys were scarce) at a sake tasting, but I did have some interesting conversations with total strangers, and I made a cool female friend. So I guess Social Circles served its purpose, which—as with other social-networking groups like the Lunch Club ([www.thelunchclub.net](http://www.thelunchclub.net)) and Young Friends of Film at Lincoln Center ([www.filmlinc.com](http://www.filmlinc.com))—is to connect people who share common interests, even if those interests are not necessarily romantic. This was hardly a waste of time, but for better prospects, I’m taking my search elsewhere.—BC

*Social Circles (212-505-9985; [www.socialcircles.com](http://www.socialcircles.com)). Membership is approximately \$90 per month, and some events require additional fees.*

**CATCH ME A CATCH**

Next stop: **It’s Just Lunch**, which arranges low-pressure meetings over lunch, brunch or drinks for time-strapped professionals. I gave director Jill Vador the details of my dream date in a face-to-face interview and got a call the very next day with two possible matches. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to hook up with my dates before press time, but from our relaxed and (quite honestly) fun meeting, I felt confident that Jill had a good handle on the type of guy I was looking for. A satisfied IJL client, who asked to be identified only as Philip, told us that his setups have been on the money in terms of looks, personality and compatibility. “Most of the time, they are dead-on,” Philip says of his matchmakers. “Sometimes they miss the mark by a country mile, but that’s what this thing’s all about. There’s serendipity involved in every human meeting—it’s either going to click or it’s not.” For him, having a third party screen out the time wasters is a big selling point, and I agree, but the downside of this industry is the high price. Lisa Clampitt, a former social worker who runs VIP Life executive match service, intends to change that. In response to what she saw as a lack of affordable, quality-controlled matchmakers in the industry, she and partner Jerome Chasques opened the **Matchmaking Institute** in the fall. The institute offers what she hopes will become a standardized certification class for newcomers to the field, in which students learn a range of skills. The school also plans to host a database of its graduates.—BC

• *It’s Just Lunch (212-750-8899; [www.itsjustlunch.com](http://www.itsjustlunch.com)). Six-month membership is \$1,000, which includes a minimum of six dates.*

• *Matchmaking Institute (877-232-8743; [www.matchmakinginstitute.com](http://www.matchmakinginstitute.com)). The next matchmaker-certification course is Feb 27–29.*

**FOR MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY**

I got hit on by three guys at this classy jackets-required party at Branch. They were all over 50, but hey, it was the most action I’d seen all week. Started by Jed Canaan and his father, Lee, five months ago, **Gotham Parties** throws monthly soirees for the 40-plus crowd at stylish venues such as the Supper Club and Eugene, each drawing upwards of 300 guests. The company charges a set fee of \$20 per party (there’s no cost to join) and provides a mildly rocking environment with a DJ, dancing, hors d’oeuvres and sideline entertainment like a fortune-teller or handwriting analyst. After politely dodging my three silver suitors, I waited for a turn with the palm reader. But after 30 minutes in line, I lost patience, scouted the room one last time for someone closer to my age, then took a swig of my drink and headed home. No matter what the psychic would have told me, I was pretty sure that my romantic future was not with this crowd.—BC  
*Gotham Parties (212-802-7267; [www.gotham-parties.com](http://www.gotham-parties.com)).*

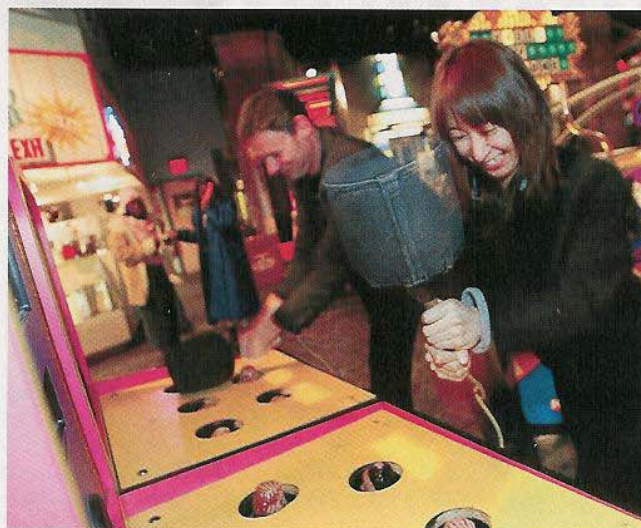
**OUTINGS AND ABOUTINGS**

Gay men who are looking for a boyfriend—and have some cash to burn—might want to check out **Urban Outings** (an offshoot of Social Circles). The company hosts events almost every night of the week, and its website lets you peruse the profiles of other attendees. The goings-on run the gamut from traditional restaurant, theater and movie events to classes on French cooking and pop-video dancing. I checked out the scene twice recently, and, on the whole, found the guys, mostly in their late thirties to mid-forties, to be a congenial bunch. Beginner Yoga, with a dozen men at Integrate Yoga in the West Village, provided ample time for chitchat before and after the 90-minute session. Dinner with the group at a nearby restaurant sounded fun, but I opted out after hearing that the only guy who’d caught my eye wasn’t going. The other event, a walking tour called Secrets of Grand Central, was fascinating, but unfortunately, only the Beautiful Arts-style landmark made my heart swell.—KM

*Urban Outings ([www.gdcuo.com](http://www.gdcuo.com)). Three-month membership is \$49.99 (monthly rate is lower for longer terms); some events require additional fees.*

**CHECK MATES**

The name says it all: **ManMate**. Started in 1985 by gay matchmaker Grant Wheaton, the dating service has nearly 2,000 studmuffins, mostly professionals in their thirties and forties. “Grant provides a certain level of quality control,” says Richard, 38, who has met seven men since signing up about 18 months ago. He says he’s had a lot in common with most of the guys, and he hasn’t been disappointed with their looks either. Wheaton prides himself on conducting thorough interviews that cover both the heart-wrenching (why have your past relationship busted up?) and the obvious (describe your fantasy man).—KM  
*ManMate (212-580-9595; [www.manmate.com](http://www.manmate.com)). Memberships start at \$495 for three introductions and a one-year listing.*



**ABOUT FACE** Eight at Eight (pictured here) and Social Circles (left) organize low-pressure group events so that people can look for love—or friendship—in person.