

Computer can find target for Cupid's straight arrow

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Staff Writer

Searching for Mr. or Mrs. Right? For those of you hoping to find that special someone, there are options you can take — in the privacy of your own home.

Your home computer can be turned into your personal dating service. Just ask Cupid, or consult his network.

Cupid's Network, accessed on the Internet, can match you with singles organizations from around the corner and around the world. It's a place to look if you're looking for love, or just want to get to know someone.

If you're on the Internet, Cupid's Network is at <http://www.cupidnet.com>.

"There are so many organizations out there, I just thought it would be neat if you had one central reference point to start from," said Dan Bender, 34, a Sagamore Hills resident and president of Cupid's Network.

Bender said the network is the encyclopedia for savvy singles looking for love in cyberspace.

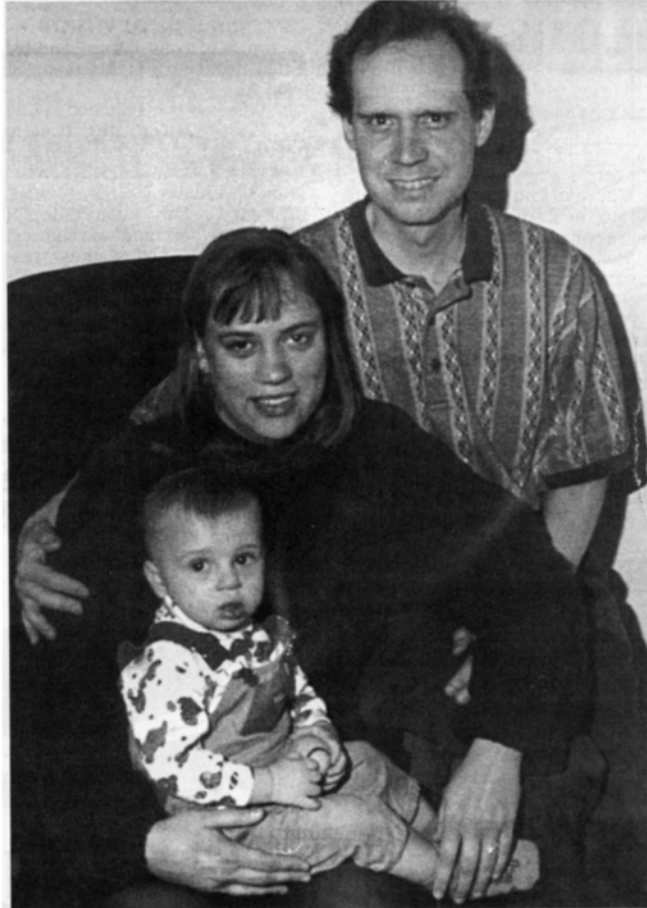
Three years ago, Bender, then a California resident, was trying to manage a hectic, consuming career. Making time to meet his future mate was tough.

So he spent his time on-line, accessing friends via computer. He also put out an ad for companionship on the Prodigy on-line service.

Bender knew of other singles groups. His friend, author and lecturer Rich Gosse, a self-proclaimed authority on the single lifestyle from Los Angeles, was making headlines with one of those organizations called American Singles.

If Bender had looked in the newspaper, he might have found a few others. But there wasn't any one place for him to look. That's when he got the idea for Cupid's Network.

Bender wanted to centralize singles organizations and informational material under one network accessed by computer. Otherwise, he said they could stay lost in cy-



Dan Bender, right, and his wife, Nancy, pose with their son, Noah, 1. They say they are living proof online matchmaking works. Dan Bender is president of an on-line matchmaking firm called Cupid's Network.

berspace.

The challenge to combine them was a labor of love, but he was persistent and Cupid's Network became a reality in 1993.

Now, everything from personal profiles and area activities, to fighting bad breath, audio and videotapes, romantic gifts and travel guides, can be found with a few clicks of the mouse.

Maybe skeptical singles should wait before shaking their heads in disbelief. Bender, a self-employed computer consultant, said he can put Cupid's arrows where they count.

Remember that personal ad that Bender put on Prodigy? He'll never forget it.

His wife-to-be, Nancy Speerbrecher, now 24, of Sagamore Hills,

was not really interested in finding anyone, especially via home computer.

"It was my boss," Nancy said. "She was looking for someone through the personal ads on Prodigy. When I showed up for work, she had printed a whole stack of ads for me and set aside a stack she said didn't sound like losers."

Curious, Nancy went to the computer and began contacting people. She felt safe. She didn't have to meet anyone she didn't want to, and if she didn't want to talk to anyone, she didn't have to.

But a few paragraphs on the computer turned into a few weeks of getting to know Dan in California.

"All of the sudden, he said he was coming to town on business," Nancy said.

Although Nancy agreed to meet him, she was skeptical.

"He told me he had a plane and it sounded like a line," she said. "I mean, you know how guys tell you things."

But she had a feeling about him

from their computer chats, and agreed to meet him for dinner.

"I had a friend planted in the restaurant, though, just in case," she said. "You still have to be careful." But within a few minutes, Nancy and Dan were comfortable, and Nancy said they felt they already knew each other.

"You get to know people a lot faster on the computer, there's less fear," Dan Bender said. "I think it's because it's almost like writing in a journal or diary, you just tell people a lot more."

"There's no worrying about what someone looks like, or struggling with that awkwardness of going on a first date," he said.

Although discovering someone can happen fast on the computer, there are precautions strictly adhered to, especially for women. Bender said women's phone numbers and addresses are never released unless they are given out by the person who owns them.

"Security is one of our highest requirements," Bender said. "The

only way someone gets your phone number is if you give it to them."

With thousands of users on the system from the United States and other countries, according to Bender, there is one outstanding fact, he said. There are about 33 percent more men on-line than women.

"In this situation, women can be like kids in a candy store; there are lots of men to choose from," Bender said. "If you're a woman, you can be a lot more picky. It's because men are more willing to place and respond to ads, and they'll keep them on longer."

As for Nancy and Dan, they don't need any more ads. After months of romance, they married in August 1993. He quickly agreed to relocate to Sagamore Hills where most of Nancy's family lives. They have a son, Noah, 1.

"The Internet is just another tool you can use to help find the love of your life," Bender said.

P.S. Bender did have a plane, Nancy said.