

maleCall

Now that you've thoroughly messed up your Valentine's Day and before you start messing up another St. Paddy's, we thought it might be good to offer some alternatives to the ordinary Internet dating scene to ring in the spring.



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Phoenix

You've tried the bar scene – too creepy. You see the same old people at parties and in the produce section you haunt at TJ's. All you meet at the dog park is...dogs. Time for some good old-fashioned no-pressure fun.

Your diligent Male Call Investigative Team™ has been out there checking out the free stuff so you don't have to. And here's what we came up with, ranging from good clean fun to... well...the other side.

Let's start with the good clean.

If you're just looking to meet people who like to do things around the Valley, you might want to check MEETin PHOENIX at www.meetin.org. Click on "Phoenix" or any of the other cities you're interested in to see what's going on at any given time. Usually there are at least a few events every day.

It's a national operation founded less than three years ago in D.C., now with hundreds of city-specific chapters. Joining is completely free and many of the activities are free too – people just get together and do things like hiking, biking and happy-houring.

I had a chance to talk to the founder, who just goes by the name "Mikey," who insists it's not a dating site.

"In fact, I go to great lengths to tell people this is not the right site for them to go to. Our purpose is to get people hanging out for friendships."

Basically, it's social networking. You post a profile and sign up for events or just show up.

The group's primary focus is to provide a relaxed, "non-pickup-scene" social environment for people to enjoy without paying membership fees.

Next up, a Canadian invention, eh? It's called Plenty Of Fish and can be found at www.plentyoffish.com.

This is a multipurpose site with both dating profiles and a variety of discussion forums. The nice thing is that, unlike many free sites, they somehow manage to keep the spammers, adult website promoters and other lowlifes out. Somehow I slipped through the net.

And that takes us to the free-for-all known as Craigslist at www.phoenix.craigslist.org.

Craigslist is fast gaining a reputation as the place where you can get anything, anytime. That's "any" as in "any."

Need a tennis partner for Wednesday mornings? Want to sell your Elvis doll collection? Looking for a roomie? Got an urge to correspond about anything from adoption to wine tasting? Want to hook up with someone, sight unseen, for a night on the town?

Craig's your man.

Be advised that Craig-the-man started this operation in San Francisco, so it has a certain anything-goes character to it. However, it's pretty much member-policed so your post – be it an ad or just a rant – can get flagged and deleted by other members at any time for any reason.

I'd suggest getting in slowly. Peruse the "Strictly Platonic" section. Find a discussion board that interests you. Check out "Missed Connections." Work your way up to the "Personals."

But don't say I didn't warn you.

James Roberts is a significantly over 40-something Phoenix-based writer, author of "On Being Eight Again" and "The Tao of Coyote." Divorced with no children, he has been exploring the dating scene and collecting tales of woe for many years. Need a guy's perspective? Jot a note to Male Call at jrobertpenn@aol.com.