



Find Your Sud

By Katie McPherson

If there's one thing everyone in the Ocala dating pool agrees on, it's that it can be hard to meet new people in the area. But that's a little odd considering between Ocala and Gainesville there are approximately 95,208 singles. Ellie Hancock agreed, and like all good ideas, her plan to change the dating scene unfolded over wine and good conversation with a friend.

Ellie wasn't just interested in meeting someone special. As a working mother, she was often left with no time to socialize, and when she was, meeting friends proved difficult. Single Only Area Professionals (SOAP) is an in-person social networking group for singles ages 25 to 55 meant to remedy that problem through bi-monthly events and icebreakers.



Photo courtesy of Corgi Photo

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— Ellie Hancock

"I didn't start it because I wanted to date, but I wanted the social aspect of something to do with friends as a single mom with a business. It's not what a lot of people assume," Ellie explains, stating that while two serious relationships (which they call suds—get it?) have come from SOAP, innumerable friendships have been born as well.

That's why SOAP rocks—no pressure. "It's a unique approach to online dating that allows people to meet in a comfortable, friendly environment. It's where real people meet real people," says member Steve Anton. Fellow member Anthony Valadez agrees.

"At first I was worried about the pressure of having to meet somebody, but it wasn't like that at all. The guys are cool, the girls are cool, and we kind of hang out as a group, and it's been great. There's real people, real personalities, and that's something you don't get online."

SOAP hosts one or two events each month, like wine tours or board game tournaments. Members have online profiles so they can browse before meeting, but they only include a name, photo, age range, profession and whether or not the member has children.

"Profiles are short and sweet so they're actually forcing people to have a conversation," explains Ellie. She says members even meet people at SOAP they'd passed over on other dating sites and, while they're not a perfect match, have built strong friendships.

Member Loren Burry recently became engaged to her fiancé, Jake, after meeting through SOAP.

"Honestly had I only seen his profile or his Facebook page, I probably never would have dated him. The fact that the group existed and I was able to get to know him in person for a few hours, it turned out I really enjoyed his personality. The group is amazing because you get past the superficial online dating profile and you actually get to meet these people," she says.

Don't let the financial investment keep you from getting sudsy. Membership dues are **\$14.99** monthly, but members will get their money's worth.

"If you're already a member you get discounts on tickets, like transport and entrance to a wine tasting," Ellie says. "I try to get discounts, so it's almost like they're getting that \$15 back."

If you're considering jumping in, the first event with SOAP is free. Contact SOAP to set up your trial meetup and see if the group is for you (we have a feeling it will be).

Upcoming Events

Apr. 16 Cards Against Humanity Tournament

Apr. 28 Thursday Night Dinner @ Bonefish



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