

Milton • Means Business

Local women starting up singles club

Group's first meeting slated for Sunday

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**

The Champion

When it comes to meeting like-minded people for friendship or something more, many men and women find a bar just isn't the best place with its loud music and "meat market" mentality.

So said Miltonians Helen Vanderbreggen and Carol VanderMaaden — two single women in their forties and fifties respectively — who decided to create the atmosphere in which they'd feel comfortable socializing.

And so began SinglesGet2Gather, a new business the pair is launching with its first event May 16 at Stecchino's Italian Eatery and Wine Bar, 500 Steeles Avenue, from 4 to 7 p.m. for ages 35 and up. A second event, also at Stecchino's, will be held May 30 from 4 to 7 p.m. for those aged 25 and up.

"I went out into the single world, and I'd go to dances. But what was lacking was good conversation," Ms Vanderbreggen said.

That wasn't easy to find when half the facility's occupants were a little tipsy, Ms Vanderbreggen said, laughing at her attempts to talk to people.

At about the same time, Ms VanderMaaden was experiencing a similar ordeal, she said, finding nothing of worth in the bar scene, and not impressed with speed dating and some of the other meeting "opportunities."

Joined forces to start new venture

It was when Ms VanderMaaden put a notice in the paper to start up a book club that Ms Vanderbreggen called, and the two quickly became friends and allies, just months later forming SinglesGet2Gather.

"The idea was to create a social club that's not necessarily for romantic connections, but if that happens, great," Ms Vanderbreggen said.

Each social event the women put on will be designed so nobody feels uncomfortable, they said.

When people walk into the room, they won't be facing a room full of strangers. Rather, they'll be greeted by an 'ambassador', who will take them and make some introductions until they feel comfortable on her own.

"We want to take away the fear of rejection and meet friends with the same interests," Ms Vanderbreggen said.

Admission to the May 16 and 30 events costs \$29.95. The atmosphere will be casual — with drinks and an appetizer buffet.

The two women said much thought was put into the day and time at which the event would be held. They concluded there's often not much to do on a Sunday afternoon, adding the event is



Carol VanderMaaden (left) and Helen Vanderbreggen are excited about the upcoming first meeting for their SinglesGet2Gather.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

purposely kept to just a few hours. "It's a safe environment that women want," Ms VanderMaaden said.

There's just one rule: "When you enter the room to meet some new friends, you must speak to everyone you encounter," Ms Vanderbreggen said. "Even if you just say 'hello', everyone will feel more at ease and welcome."

Both Ms VanderMaaden and Ms Vanderbreggen have raised children in Milton and decided it was the perfect place to start up their new business since there's nothing else like SinglesGet2Gather in the area, they said.

In addition to SinglesGet2Gather, Ms VanderMaaden runs her own company, Full Potential. Through this company, Ms VanderMaaden focuses on the various needs of women. Each month, Full Potential members gather for a workshop headed by Ms VanderMaaden.

Topics range from communication and interpersonal development to business skills.

She said it's her love for helping people reach their potential that inspired her — with Ms Vanderbreggen — to think up SinglesGet2Gather.

"I've been on a personal growth mission for two decades now," she said, adding she now desires to pass on some of what she's learned, and hopes to eventually offer some of these workshops at SinglesGet2Gather.

Ultimately, the goal is that — through friendships — attendees of the events will learn more about themselves "to go forward in life," Ms Vanderbreggen said.

The women said future gatherings will be held in neighbouring areas like Georgetown and Oakville and eventually, Ms VanderMaaden said, they hope to franchise SinglesGet2Gather.

For more information on SinglesGet2Gather, or to register, visit www.singlesget2gather.com or call (905) 875-2384.

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