



PARTY OF EIGHT

WE TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT A PROGRAM THAT IS REVOLUTIONIZING GAY DATING; PLUS, PLENTY OF OTHER GREAT PLACES TO TAKE A DATE IF YOU END UP MEETING YOUR MATCH.

If finding the time to find a significant other seems like a daunting task, consider this scenario: You're sitting at a table at an upscale New York restaurant with seven other men. They're all gay, all single, and all interested in a long-term relationship. Whether this sounds like utopia or an awkward night out, consider the undeniable plus: Each of these men was pre-selected as a person who might strike your romantic interest.

Back when Grant Wheaton — founder of all-gay dating service **MANMATE** (www.manmate.com) — was single, he felt

frustrated by the gay dating scene. "The problem with Internet or clubs and bars is a lack of honesty and follow-through... because the emphasis is on immediate gratification," Wheaton said. "There's kind of a cruise-y feel to hooking up as opposed to developing something substantial."

Most Internet dating sites focus strictly on sex; others push the opposite: intense one-on-one interaction, with Dr. Phil promising to hook you up with your soul mate. **ManMate's Dinners for Eight** program, now in its fourth year, provides a much-needed middle ground, in which "potential couples" don't immediately have to pair off. "It gives you more of a selection and sort of takes the pressure off," Wheaton said. "There are more choices in terms of chemistry."

At **DF8**, eight single guys share conversation over dinner, giving each person at the table the chance to naturally gravitate toward whomever they may find intriguing. "It's very much like a meet 'n' greet that these guys know how to do for their jobs," said Glen Miller, **Dinners for Eight** manager and event host. "But they're doing it for their personal lives." To help the process along, Miller attends each dinner, acting as an ice-breaker. Afterwards, each participant fills out a confidential feedback form letting the **ManMate** matchmakers know who they would like to see again. "I like that part of the feedback process because I think guys are willing to take chances if I'm going to do it for them," Miller said. "They're more willing to open themselves up and say 'I felt kind of a connection.'"

On a more platonic note, **Dinners for Eight** also provides a social network for professional, career-minded gay men. Because **ManMate** members are all screened by Wheaton in an initial interview process, most of its members are in similar stages of their lives — providing instant common ground. "The coolest thing that can happen is for everyone to connect with everybody else in the group at some level," Miller said. "If they end up dating, that's great — it's a home run. You maybe won't meet your next boyfriend at one of our parties — but you never know who someone at that party may introduce you to."

(— Erin De Jesus)

Another good place to sit at a table full of gay men is **THE NIGHT OF A THOUSAND GOWNS** (3.31.2007, www.imperial-courtney.org), though the chances are much greater that these men will be wearing wigs and hose. Also likely to be wearing wigs and hose that night? Co-chairs and special guests includ-