



Carbon Neutral Love

by [Jamie Calnan](#), staff writer

OCTOBER 15, 2009 4:49 PM

Ring! Ring! Ring! Time is up! As one man picks up his cocktail and arises from his seat, the rest of them follow. They rotate around the tables and dark green lettuce centerpieces in a counter-clockwise motion, spending only a few minutes with each lovely lady. They all know that at the end of the night, some people may have met their match, while others may go home alone and still single. But this speed dating isn't like the rest. This speed dating session is green friendly.

Local coffee shops, dark dive bars, five star restaurants, crowded muni trains, personal ads on Craigslist.... you name it, and it's almost guaranteed that couples in San Francisco have hooked up at said place. However, wouldn't it be nice to know a bit more than the face value of the stranger you are about to get busy with?

This month, the Orchard Garden Hotel, a LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) certified hotel in busy downtown San Francisco, partnered up with a website called Green Speed Dating, with one goal in mind: hooking up eco-friendly couples.

"I really have no expectations going into it," said first timer Alison Chumnavech, a 31-year-old in corporate finance. "I figure the worse case scenario is that I leave with a really funny story to tell my friends and best case scenario I meet someone."

But for many single people looking for that special someone, it is hard to connect the dots between dating and the environment, let alone to find someone who shares the same environmental values as them. Green Speed Dating, also known as "carbon neutral love", brings together people who live in the same area and have similar

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[Thomas Levinson](#) | staff photographer

Sandra Pellegrino chats with her speed date during the Green Speed Dating event held at Orchard Garden Hotel in San Francisco on October 3, 2009.

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interests when it comes to the environment.

"Social gatherings in the 'green community' are a great thing," said Jacquelynn Ybarra, a consultant for a Santa Barbara based 'green' company. "It is nice to be surrounded with like-minded people to learn from and share stories with."

Green Speed Dating started about a year and a half ago when Jenean Smith, who works with the Bay Area non-profit solar electricity company Power to the People, found herself stumped while brainstorming fundraising ideas. All of a sudden the idea of green speed dating hit her.

"I am green and single so the idea was on my radar," said Smith. "Plus it's a great fundraiser and an even better way to get people from the community involved."

Since then, Smith has hosted about ten events in the Los Angeles area and one in San Francisco. Each event has hosted about 15-30 people. Each dater normally goes home with at least one match. From there it is up to the participants to follow up with their match and arrange a second date.

With hundreds of dating websites online these days it was only a matter of time before the trend would mix with one of our society's newest obsessions: becoming green. Websites such as green-passions.com, greensingles.com, planetearthsingles.com and treehugger.com have recently grown in membership numbers but don't always work out so well for every member.

Green Speed Dating, on the other hand, is able to narrow your search down a little bit more by putting you in groups according to age, location and level of eco-concern. Plus, you don't have to worry about misleading photo shopped profile pictures and unlike normal dates, if you don't like the person you are out of there before you even begin to think of a legitimate excuse to bail. And trust me, chances are you will know within those first few minutes if you are interested or if it is time for another glass of organically grown wine.

"You always hope to get a date out of an event like this," said Sandra Pellegrino, a 38-year-old who works in the solar industry. "But even if you do not, it is a good experience. Plus, it is a good way

to narrow down what you are and aren't looking for."

The only catch is the fee, normally around \$25, which you must pay when you sign up. However, there is an up side: all the money is donated to the Solar School Project, a non-profit program created by Power to the People earlier this year. The program's goal is to install a solar electric system to the roof of a public school in a small village of Nicaragua that has no electricity at all.

"People are more than willing to give money when they get something out of it" said Smith.

Green Speed Dating and The Orchard Garden Hotel have already begun thinking about plans for the next speed dating event, which will take place around January. So keep your eye out for flyers or check the website to reserve your seat now.

"I just love the concept," said Ybarra. "Little green couples running around, procreating and changing the world."

For more information visit www.greenspeeddating.com.

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