

New York PULSE

Girl magnet

Winning the dating game can be as simple as hiring a \$50 'Wingwoman'

By BETH SOBOL

It's happy hour, and Midtown bar El Rio Grande is packed. I feel a tap on my shoulder and turn around. "You must be Beth," he says, grinning. "I'm Chris."

I smile, relieved — Chris Matthews is tall, blond and (phew) definitely attractive.

And for the next two hours, it will be my job to introduce him to every available girl he wants to meet.

I'm not his date — I'm his "Wingwoman."

It's all thanks to Shane Forbes. The single, 29-year-old entrepreneur realized it wasn't his male friends introducing him to eligible women — it was his female ones.

"I'd go out with my female

friends and, all of a sudden, I'm meeting new girls I never would have met if I was out with another guy," Forbes said.

"When guys are out together, they usually just stand there. But throw a girl in the mix, and they're cooler and much more approachable."

Sure, most men probably have a friend they could enlist, but Forbes was willing to bet they'd pay to have someone dedicated solely to the task.

Putting his theory to the test, he launched Wingwomen.com this past December. For \$50 an hour, a single man can book his own wingwoman for the night.

Attractive and outgoing, a wingwoman acts not as a date,

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Chris Matthews with his "Wingwoman," Post reporter Beth Sobol; at right, they chat up two women at Midtown bar El Rio Grande.



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Wingin' it to find gals

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but as a social lubricant, helping men mingle with and meet other women. While the price might sound steep, New York bachelors seem willing to pay. Since launching, Forbes has cultivated a loyal clientele of about 60 single men.

He recruits his wingwomen through ads in newspapers and on Web sites like Craigslist — and so far, most applicants are professional women or students looking to make a little extra money.

While good looks are a requirement, Forbes stresses that a vibrant personality is vital. In fact, he'll run practice sessions with would-be wingwomen to make sure their charisma is honed to a tee.

And then he'll match them up with one of his clients — paying the wingwomen \$30 an hour for their work.

"About half the bookings are one-on-one situations," says Forbes. "The other half are groups of guys who just want a few fun girls to go out with."

Men aren't obligated to pay for their wingwoman's drinks, but Forbes says he's never had a situation where they haven't.



"I would definitely use a 'Wingwoman' again," says Chris Matthews, with Beth Sobol.

Hourly rates? Free drinks? I raise an eyebrow. What keeps a paying customer from thinking wingwoman isn't a fancy term for hooker?

"My mother had the same question," Forbes laughs. "Wingwomen cannot go to your apartment. No hotel rooms, taxis or limos. No phone numbers are exchanged. I've never

had a problem with a client misunderstanding the situation."

Still skeptical, I accept Forbes' challenge to be a wingwoman for a night.

A Ben Affleck lookalike, Chris certainly doesn't strike me as the type of guy who has trouble picking up women.

"I usually don't," he admits, "but I work in a small

office and it doesn't give me the opportunity to meet new people." On the recommendation of a friend, he decided to book a wingwoman.

"I don't have any expectations," he tells me. "Let's just have fun and see what happens."

We start off slowly, getting to know each other over a round of margari-

tas. But then I remember why we're here — and that I have a job to do.

I approach a group of women at the bar. After introducing myself, I bring Chris over. They're friendly, but wary. Finally, one pulls me aside.

"Why on earth," she asks, "are you introducing your boyfriend to a group of girls?"

I explain that he's not my boyfriend. While most wingwomen simply say the client is a "friend of a friend," I tell them he's a family friend who I love like a brother. And that nothing would make me happier than finding him a nice girl.

With that, the floodgates open. The girls are asking him where he works, where he lives and what he's doing later.

Then I notice Chris eyeing two pretty blondes standing on the patio. I go over and compliment one on her outfit.

With the connection made, I call Chris over. Within minutes, the four of us are chatting away. I am amazed at how natural it all seems.

One of the women has a boyfriend. The other, however, definitely has her sights set on Chris.

I glance at my watch. It's 9:30 — half an hour past the two hours Chris booked.

"I had a blast," he says. "I will never leave my wingwoman behind again."

As I dash into a cab, my cell phone rings. It's Forbes calling to follow-up, as he does with every booking.

I tell him I left Chris flanked by the two blondes. "Nothing wrong with that," he laughs.

It's not customary for wingwomen and clients to stay in touch, but I call Chris a few days later to dish. Turns out, he just had his first date with the blonde.

"We had a good time, we're getting to know each other," he tells me. "You did great! I would definitely use a wingwoman again."

Forbes says most men come out of their wingwomen evenings with at least one new phone number.

No permanent love connections have been made yet, but that hasn't stopped many of his clients from returning.

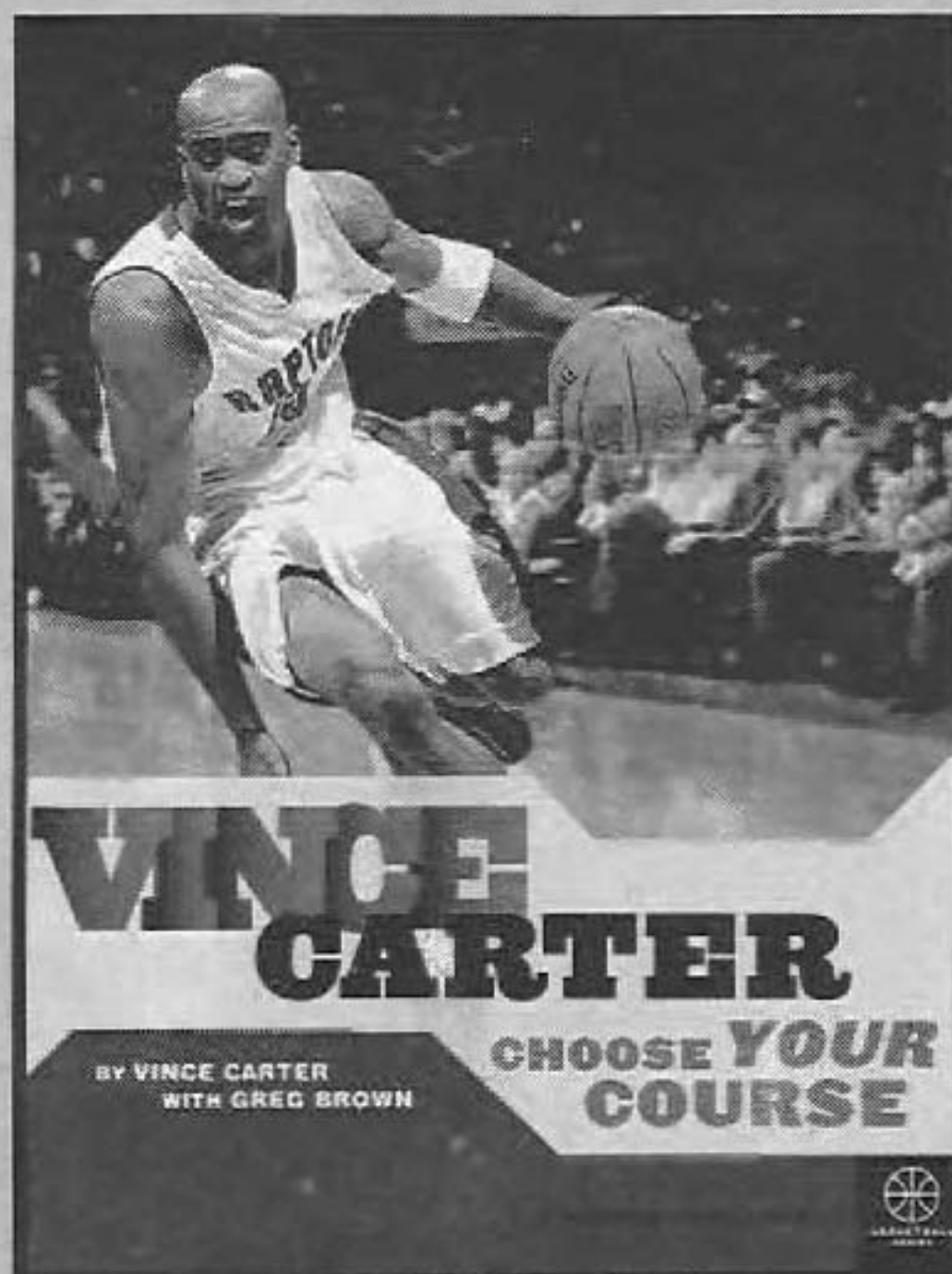
Apparently they, like Forbes, think that when it comes to finding romance, it's best not to fly solo.

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