

McNeill got word in 1987 to hand over operations to local staffers and pack for home. That's when they decided to jump ship. The partners pooled \$70,000 in savings, moved from company-paid apartments to cramped flats, and rented a small office. "We financed the entire venture out of savings and cash flow, even though there wasn't always a lot of cash to flow," says Blagg.

Their first client was the U.S. Agricultural Trade Office in Tokyo, which hired them to write a 400-page, statistic-stuffed tome on the Japanese food service market for American exporters. The \$55,000 fee barely covered expenses, but Blagg and McNeill got a detailed look at the market, and their research introduced them to a host of potential clients.

Newman's Own, the food business set up by actor Paul Newman, was one of the first to sign up. Blagg and McNeill convinced Newman's company to modify two of its pasta sauces for Japanese tastes by adding meat to one and making the other less spicy. They then persuaded Amway to add the sauces to the gourmet packaged foods it was already selling in Japan. Tyson Foods hired Blagg and McNeill in 1988 to help develop new products for Japan. Tyson had been selling mostly frozen chicken parts in Japan, but switched to things like chicken patties for sandwiches at local fast-food chains and frozen take-home chicken nuggets with a light batter coating. Tyson's 50% share of U.S. chicken exports to Japan is now worth about \$100 million.

Japanese consume most of their raisins in baked goods. So for their client the California Raisin Administrative Committee, Blagg and McNeill have sponsored bakers' contests requiring raisins to be blended with traditional Japanese ingredients like red bean paste and rice flour.

Blagg and McNeill haven't gotten rich yet, but Market Makers' revenues reached \$1.2 million last year. Now Blagg and McNeill have taken on 11 local employees experienced in the food industry. They think the best is yet to come for people selling foreign processed foods in Japan. "Since the Japanese don't want to grub around in fields anymore, I'd say the future is very positive," says Blagg.

Disappointed by blind dates, personal ads and video dating services, Andrea McGinty started her own matchmaking firm. She found a career—and a husband.

Yuppie yenta

By Suzanne Oliver

IN 1991 ANDREA MCGINTY'S fiancé walked out on her five weeks before the wedding. It was back to the singles scene for the 29-year-old Chicago-based marketing manager for a California jewelry firm.

One blind date threw a pizza against the wall when she got up to leave. Personal ads didn't do much: McGinty is 5 foot 9, and most of the men who answered her ads seemed to be about 5 foot 6. She went to a video dating service, where an attendant told her: "The bad news is you're getting old, but you're still semi-attractive." McGinty decided to keep the \$2,300 the service would have cost her.

There had to be a more civilized and convenient way to meet potential partners. Wouldn't it be nice if there were a dating service that arranged prescreened lunch dates for busy pro-

fessionals like herself? "Lunch is over in an hour, and you don't have to kiss goodnight," she dreamed.

Why not start one? And McGinty did. Her company, It's Just Lunch, has 6,000 customers and chalked up \$2.5 million in revenues last year. The little firm has offices in Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Dallas and Indianapolis. This year McGinty plans to open offices in Baltimore, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Wilmington, Del.

McGinty charges \$675 for arranging eight dates. Lunch is extra, dutch treat. McGinty claims her clients are highly educated: About 95% graduated from college, and 80% have graduate degrees. "These are people who spent their 20s in graduate school, then working long hours in fast-track careers. Now they need help with their social lives," says McGinty.



No goodnight kisses

Clients of It's Just Lunch on a midday blind date.

Before starting, McGinty checked out the competition. Posing as a client, she visited ten dating services, collecting questionnaires and taking notes. "None of them had the low-tech, high level of personal service I was looking for," says McGinty.

McGinty was determined to set herself apart from the crowded dating service field. Others typically had applicants fill out a questionnaire or look at videotapes of potential dates; McGinty decided to take a more personal approach. She determined to spend an hour interviewing each client for a more personal and judgmental approach. Before putting a couple together, she wanted to meet both parties.

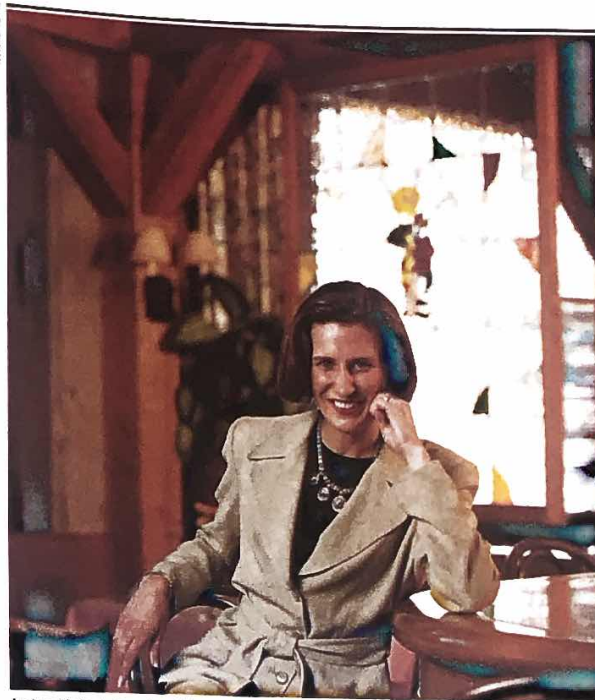
When she had matched a couple, McGinty planned to have an assistant phone the clients and make the lunch reservations. To McGinty, feedback was all-important—an extra touch most other services ignored. Thus, after each date, members were to call McGinty to report what they liked or didn't like about the date. McGinty used the feedback when making the members' next matches.

To get started, McGinty spent \$400 buying lists from R.R. Donnelley & Sons' marketing research division. She wanted very specific information: the names of single people aged 25 to 50 in each zip code who had college degrees, earned at least \$50,000 annually and owned their residence or rented it for \$975 a month or more. She got 165,000 names clustered in ten zip codes in Chicago's downtown and Lincoln Park neighborhood.

In November 1991 she quit her marketing job and \$550 a month for a small downtown Chicago office and started doing what the \$6,000 she had saved. The first \$1,000 went to print 20,000 brochures, some of which she and a friend handed under doors early one Sunday morning. McGinty then went back to her office to wait for the phone to ring.

When the first interested caller asked how many members she had, McGinty said naively, "Why, you're the first." He said he'd call back in a few months.

Her second caller brought better luck. She was a public relations consultant who wanted to represent



Andrea McGinty, founder of It's Just Lunch
On \$2.5 million in revenues, she nets \$400,000.

McGinty's business in exchange for dates. McGinty agreed, and the flattery paid off. Within a couple of months It's Just Lunch got writeups in *Crain's Chicago Business* and in *Chicago* magazine. McGinty's phone began to ring. Three months after opening, she had over 400 members, who paid \$400 each for six dates.

As business grew, McGinty started spending \$4,000 a month for ads in *Chicago* magazine, the *Chicago Reader*, *Chicago Lawyer* magazine and the business section of the *Chicago Tribune*—outlets she hoped would attract a mostly professional, college-educated crowd. A friend at the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson designed the ads for just \$400 each. The ads featured pictures of McGinty and her then-partner, Margaret Kunkler. Why? So that potential male customers would see that the people who ran the agency were young, at-

tractive and professional looking. (McGinty has since bought her partner out.) In 1993 McGinty opened two offices in suburban Chicago and a branch in Manhattan. Last year she spent \$150,000 cash to acquire dating services in Washington, D.C., and Dallas, and opened a new office in Philadelphia.

The business is a cash machine, netting \$400,000 after taxes last year on revenues of \$2.5 million. The biggest expense is advertising. She has 21 employees. McGinty pays herself a \$180,000 salary, double what she was making selling jewelry.

And what of McGinty's own love life? Two years ago a Chicago lawyer who had just signed up for the service asked McGinty for a date. After thinking it over for a day, she refunded Daniel Dolan's fee and went to dinner with him. They were married last summer.