

Love at what cost?

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Abstract (Summary)

The woman told [Denise Melahn] that someone from "Members Relations" would call Melahn shortly with her profile and access ID. "I never got a call," she said. "At this point I was feeling very uncomfortable so I checked my contract and it stated that I would have access within 7 days."

Barb Sluppick, founder of the watchdog Web site, [RomanceScams.org](#), said Melahn's case isn't uncommon. "With dating sites, the bottom line is their revenue. I am not going to say they are dishonest, but they are not proactive in protecting their members," she said in an e-mail to Creative Loafing. "The best way to stay safe is through education. Do your research."

Melahn said that she decided that she wanted her membership to be terminated and her money back because the Web site didn't live up to its contract. At press time, Melahn was still waiting for her refund from the site. And as far as searching for love online, Melahn said, "It's in God's hands now. I'm not going there any more."

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Full Text (605 words)

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[Headnote]

NEWS

[Headnote]

Woman loses \$1,200 looking for love online

A Charlotte woman has found one of the dating service signs posted at intersections and utility poles around town may be more scam than saving grace.

Denise Melahn had been married for 23 years. Following her divorce, the 47-yearold woman didn't want to meet a guy in a bar. She'd had friends who'd been lucky finding that special someone online. So she logged on to [www.NCSingles.org](#).

You may have seen signs advertising the site - or similar ones - at street corners and shopping center parking lots: [CharlotteSingles.org](#), [DilworthSingles.com](#), [MidwoodSingles.com](#).

"I saw the signs placed around different shopping centers," Melahn said. "I decided to try it."

Melahn thought the site offered an attractive way to meet people to someone who is a little gun-shy about getting back into the dating world. "You already have issues with trust and I didn't want to meet somebody at a bar," she said. "You work all day and it is kind of difficult to meet someone in a safe way."

She filled out the questionnaire and went to an interview, to which she was instructed to bring a credit card. Melahn said she was told all members of [NCSingles.org](#) go through a screening process to verify they are independent and financially stable.

stair.

On March 25, she was invited to become a member of the organization and \$1,200 was debited from her account. The membership money was to cover trips and soirees where members were supposed to meet, Melahn said.

But then NCSingles.org didn't provide her with the login and password she needed to access her profile online and view other singles. When she called the number she'd been given when she first contacted the organization, a woman answered. "I was concerned when the girl answered with a simple hello instead of a business greeting," Melahn said.

The woman told Melahn that someone from "Members Relations" would call Melahn shortly with her profile and access ID. "I never got a call," she said. "At this point I was feeling very uncomfortable so I checked my contract and it stated that I would have access within 7 days."

On the eighth day, Melahn said, she still didn't have her login information.

People answering a customer service number for NCSingles.org declined several requests for comment. According to Betterwhois.com, a Web site that shows who owns domain names, NCSingles.org isn't even owned by someone in North Carolina. In fact, the site's owner, listed as R. Gupta, is based out of Gujarat, India.

Barb Sluppick, founder of the watchdog Web site, RomanceScams.org, said Melahn's case isn't uncommon. "With dating sites, the bottom line is their revenue. I am not going to say they are dishonest, but they are not proactive in protecting their members," she said in an e-mail to Creative Loafing. "The best way to stay safe is through education. Do your research."

NCSingles.org doesn't provide much information to potential members. It's just a picture of the Charlotte skyline, a few pretty people smiling for the camera, and a list of questions. The same questions and pictures are also on the Web site, [www. CharlotteSingles.org](http://www.CharlotteSingles.org), and several others. The only rule on the site seems to be that you must be over 18.

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