



# PARAMUS REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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[HOME](#)
[ABOUT CHAMBER](#)
[ABOUT PARAMUS](#)
[EVENTS](#)
[DIRECTORY](#)
[CONTACT](#)


## ABOUT PARAMUS

Local Retailers

Paramus Park Mall

Westfield Garden State Plaza

Bergen Town Center Vornado

Fashion Center

Paramus Towne Square

Mall at IV

Thirty Five Plaza

## Paramus Shopping

**3 minutes to network. Ready, set, go!**

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PARAMUS -- Business cards? Check. Name tag? Check. Plastic kitchen timer? Got it.

Good. You're ready to network. Just one tip: Keep it short.

Take it from Gail Allen.

Early Tuesday, before the shoppers had arrived at Westfield Garden State Plaza, Allen found herself in the middle of a three-minute chat with a well-tailored stranger. Ditto the 80 other businesspeople seated face-to-face in the mall's food court.

"This is pretty intense!" Allen, a banking professional in Hasbrouck Heights, exclaimed above the din.

Heard of speed dating? Welcome to speed networking, where participants come looking for leads rather than love.

In both cases, lingering is not allowed. But Fred Rohdieck, armed with kitchen timer and wireless mike, knows people sometimes need reminders.

"Your three minutes are up," he bellowed after the timer rang out. "Time to move."

On that cue, some people slid into the chair next to them. Others -- eager to finish a thought, or too riveted by what they were hearing -- stayed put.

"They'll take as much time as you give them," Rohdieck, president of the Paramus Regional Chamber of Commerce, said to Kathe Crimmins, his counterpart at the Tri-County Chamber in Wayne. "I think we need to get out the whips," a deadpan Crimmins shot back.

Participants in the 90-minute event -- one of several organized by area chambers in the last couple of years -- were encouraged to make connections, not sales. "The approach should be 'How can I help you?'" Rohdieck said.

With 40 conversations buzzing at once, the networkers were forced to lean across narrow tables, craning necks, cupping ears and resorting at times to hand gestures. There were even a couple of high-fives.

A few rounds into the event, Rohdieck began relying less on his plastic timer and more on human energy. As it waned, he reached for the microphone.

To be sure, dating and networking call for similar skills, and at times the two appear indistinguishable.

Faissal Yousef, a financial consultant in Oradell, considered the question all speed networkers eventually must confront: How soon is it OK to call? (Those new business contacts, that is.)

"The worst thing you can do is wait too long so that any opportunity is gone," he said. "But you don't want to call right away, either."

Where the speed dater errs in revealing too much baggage, the cardinal sin in speed networking is leaving the business cards at home.

Ross O'Brien insisted that was not his mistake; he merely miscalculated.

"I've been sucked dry," said the small-business adviser at Mahwah-based Business Support Advisory, sitting momentarily alone as the odd man out. "I thought I'd brought enough."

For her part, Lucille Skroce had an unfair advantage in winning friends -- she brought chocolate.

"I've been trying to give these away," Skroce, owner of Matisse Chocolatier in Englewood, said as she eyed her remaining treats.

Other than some complaints of hoarse voices and smile-muscle strain, the reviews were glowing. Many first-timers said they couldn't wait for the next session, scheduled for October. The fee-based events are open to the public. The chambers charge \$15 to members and \$25 to others.

Among the stragglers Tuesday were Randall Drew and Matthew Fromowitz, who drew their three minutes out into 30.

Drew, a sales manager for an alarm-system company in Clifton, said he preferred the fast pace to traditional chamber meetings, where the same people bump into each other month after month.

"It's like hitting the same fishing hole," he said. "After a while, those lunkers are gone and you're just catching minnows."

Fromowitz, a mortgage adviser in Lincoln Park, nodded. Then he remembered a chamber of commerce meeting later in Woodcliff Lake.

"Hey," Fromowitz asked his newest business contact and friend. "What are you doing tonight?"

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