

# The business of mingling

## Area's social and professional networking groups keep tabs on events — and drink specials

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It's happy hour. You walk into your favorite watering hole and head for your usual bar stool.

Right away, something seems different.

The place is packed. People are smiling and exchanging business cards. The bartender asks if you'd like to try the drink special designed specifically for the crowd.

Never one to turn down a discounted drink, you agree and wonder:

*What is going on?*

The answer: You've stumbled onto a gathering sponsored by one of Milwaukee's many social or professional networking organizations, which in recent years have become common crowds at downtown bars, restaurants and clubs.

Just a few years ago, such groups were almost non-existent for the area's young professionals. Today, there are multiple gatherings held each month for people looking to drink, looking to schmooze or looking to be cultural.

"I think that Milwaukee is developing as a city . . . and it's attracting more young professionals. They're really looking for other young professionals," said Gina Zambito, a founding member of Six and the City, a happy hour club that gathers at a different spot each Friday at 6 p.m.

To keep the crowds straight, here's a roundup of some of the major groups that you might run into, or want to join.

### Six in the City

**The background:** In 2005, Gina Zambito and two friends returned to Milwaukee after living elsewhere around the country. They struggled to meet other local young professionals and to keep up with the new bars and restaurants in the area, so they started their own happy-hour club. The founding three enlisted the help of three more friends (*voilà* - and then there were six) who take turns picking a weekly hot spot.

**The details:** The group meets at a different bar or restaurant - preferably a new one - at 6 p.m. every Friday. Members find out about the weekly destination in an e-mail sent out on Tuesdays. Details are also posted on the group's Web site, [www.6inthecity.com](http://www.6inthecity.com).

**The digits:** More than 1,000 people on the e-mail list, and anywhere from 50 to hundreds of people at each event. Participants' ages range between 22 and 45.

**The crowd:** Mostly young professionals who like to be social and network without nametags and membership fees. Not a singles club, but it has inspired relationships and marriages.

### Milwaukee Happy Hour

**The background:** Also in 2005, recent college grads William Jensen and Adam Kielpinski started a Web site listing local bar drink specials just for fun. The pair threw a few promotional parties and people were hooked. Jensen and Kielpinski, who studied entrepreneurship in college, turned the Web site into a business and will unveil a newly designed site in April.

**The details:** After the new site is launched, the group will host promotional parties and happy hours at local bars twice each month. Members can find out about the events through an e-mail newsletter, or by visiting [www.milwaukeehappyhour.com](http://www.milwaukeehappyhour.com).

**The digits:** More than 200 people on the mailing list; participants range from 21 to 35 years old.

**The crowd:** College students, young professionals and people on the lookout for cheap booze. Members of this group aren't afraid of the word "party."

## Lisa's List

**The background:** Two years ago, Lisa Blythe sent e-mails to friends listing events that sounded fun around the Milwaukee area. What she didn't know is that those friends had forwarded her e-mails to more friends. And those friends sent them on to others. And poof - a social network was born. Today, Blythe maintains a Web site ([www.lisaslist.org](http://www.lisaslist.org)) with lists of events and photos from regular gatherings. Her goal is to introduce business professionals to hip places they would not have known about otherwise.

**The details:** Every Monday, members get e-mails listing the week's social possibilities. E-mails with announcements continue to arrive through the week. Participants also get a membership card that gets them discounts at designated restaurants.

**The digits:** Events draw 40 to 60 people, mostly 35 and older. Membership costs \$40 per year, which takes care of the cover at most gatherings. Non-members can also pay a cover at the door.

**The crowd:** Slightly older than some of the other networking groups in town. The group ranges from schoolteachers to CEOs. Also in the mix: people from outlying areas who need some help finding the cool spots downtown.

## FUEL Milwaukee

**The background:** Five years ago, two 20-something guys working at GE Medical wanted a way to meet other young professionals in the city. They approached the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, which agreed that an organization was needed to help keep young talent in the region. The group, originally called Young Professionals of Milwaukee, had support from many local businesses and corporations, which encouraged their young employees to participate. Several up-and-coming young Milwaukee professionals also took the group on as a personal crusade. This month, the group was renamed FUEL Milwaukee to be more inclusive.

**The details:** The group hosts a monthly social event that showcases a new bar, restaurant or club, usually on the second Thursday of each month. Members are alerted of events through a weekly e-newsletter or at the Web site, [www.fuelmilwaukee.org](http://www.fuelmilwaukee.org).

**The digits:** FUEL has 4,500 people on its mailing list, with regular crowds of 250 to 300 people at social events. Members' ages range mostly between 25 and 35. Those who join because of a corporate partnership don't pay a membership fee. Others pay \$50 a year, which pays for free or discounted admission to gatherings.

**The crowd:** Almost all college graduates, these members come ready to introduce themselves to others and can easily leave with a pocketful of business cards. The group attracts both newcomers to Milwaukee and participants who have been to every event for years.

## Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee

**The background:** In July 2001, a handful of Hispanic young professionals sat around a kitchen table wondering how to help develop their peers into leaders and help corporations keep the talent. Two years and much planning later, Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee was introduced, offering members a chance to connect with their culture, network and develop.

**The details:** The group originally hosted regular Noche de Pachangas every third Thursday of the month at a different area Hispanic restaurant. But in recent weeks, the format changed to add education/development to the social networking. Gatherings are now also held at local museums, art galleries and businesses. Members find out about events through an e-newsletter that arrives biweekly, or at the Web site, [www.hpgm.org](http://www.hpgm.org).

**The digits:** There are more than 350 members ranging in age from 26 to 55. A \$50 annual membership fee gets you access to most events, a subscription to Aquí Milwaukee magazine and access to career networking and mentorship opportunities.

**The crowd:** A diverse group of young professionals open to making new connections through cultural and social experiences. Many people come straight from the office, so business attire is common - but people show up in jeans, too.

## Milwaukee Urban League Young Professionals

**The background:** In 1998, the National Urban League recognized that, outside of fraternities or specialized professional groups, there were no groups for young African-American professionals. The national group asked all its 40 chapters to begin a young professionals group dedicated to professional development and social action.

**The details:** This group holds monthly social and cultural events that bring members together for community activism, professional development and networking. Members get regular e-mails that announce events, or can check the Web site at [www.tmulyp.org](http://www.tmulyp.org).

**The digits:** There are 140 members ranging in age from 22 to 40 years old. A \$50 annual membership fee gets a year's subscription to Urban Influencer magazine, a Milwaukee Urban League Young Professionals T-shirt and discounts to all events.

**The crowd:** While the group was founded primarily for young African-American professionals, leaders pride themselves on a group that is inclusive to all races and backgrounds. Gatherings are made up of students and working professionals, most often in business casual attire.

## Milwaukee Social Club

**The background:** In the mid-'90s, Jerry Znidorka was a 20-something who had moved to Milwaukee from Chicago and noticed that the city didn't have an organized recreational sports network for young professionals. Znidorka conspired with local bar owners to create a touch football league, which found almost instant success. Today, the club offers nine different indoor and outdoor sports year-round. It also sponsors large social events including Miller Park tailgates, ski trips and camping weekends.

**The details:** People sign up either as a team or a "free agent" who gets placed on a team. Sports include kickball, volleyball, touch football, soccer, ultimate Frisbee, floor hockey, softball and dodge ball. Many of those teams are sponsored by area taverns and restaurants, which players frequent after the games. Details are on the site, [milwaukeeclub.com](http://milwaukeeclub.com).

**The digits:** The club has 500 members, but as many 2,000 participants who play the sports each year. A \$50 membership fee gets a \$10 discount on each sport per season and regular e-mails announcing club events. The average age of club members is 30.

**The crowd:** Sporty, recreational, casual. People who like competition but are more there for the social opportunity. Call it networking while not being afraid to get dirty.

<http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=572134>

## Social Networking Groups



All work and no play can make life boring. There are several groups in town who blend networking with social events. Here's a toast to these noble souls.



Photo/[Rick Wood](#)

Lisa's List, a social and networking group, puts Moct Bar, 240 E. Pittsburgh Ave., on its list of places to check out after work. Montgomery Morgan (left), Kat Grinker, Amy Burns, Tony Vojtas, Mike Toffler and Jereme Engel, socialize on a recent Thursday evening outing.



Six in the City, a social group for young professionals, teamed with Lisa's List at Moct. They are two of a growing number of social and professional networking groups.



Terri Santos (left) of Oak Creek and Carol Skoronski of Muskego get serenaded by David Hall, who provided live music for the Lisa's List event.