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*From the Net to the knot in 5 weeks*

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Connie LaSota and Les Brooks just clicked . . . and that was before they ever spoke or set eyes on each other.

**An online matchmaking service -- true.com -- connected them on Jan. 8. Two days later, after hours of e-mailing, Brooks sent four short messages: "Will. . . You. . . Marry. . . Me?" LaSota, who lives in Geauga County, instantly responded "YES."**

A few days later, the engaged couple -- both 46 and divorced with children -- spoke for the first time. On Jan. 24, Brooks moved from his home in upstate New York to LaSota's Hambden Township residence.

Monday, on Valentine's Day -- the three-week anniversary of the pair's first face-to-face meeting -- a judge will marry them on Chardon Square. Brooks spent \$200 on a new suit for the ceremony. LaSota bought herself a gown.

"It's wacky," admits LaSota, "but it's also a fairy tale."

Cupid's arrow, it seems, flies fast in cyberspace.

Courtship methods are changing as more people flock to Internet dating sites in the hopes of finding that special someone. Every month, an estimated 40 million people log on and go looking for love. Many finding what they're looking for.

A September survey by weddingchannel.com found that 12 percent - or roughly one out of eight - of the 4,743 couples registered on the Web site met online.

The percentage surprised even some in the industry.

"We've always heard of marriages anecdotally," said Kristin Kelly, senior director of public relations at match.com, the largest online dating service. "But we've never had numbers to show the magnitude."

The stigma of meeting online dissipates with each successful nuptial, said Andrea Baker, an Ohio University professor who has studied and written about the subject. In the late 1990s, couples who met on the Internet often hid that fact. Today, Baker said, it's not seen as unusual.

In some ways, Baker says, those who meet online develop stronger relationships and learn more about each other.

"The focus is on the inner self," Baker said. "On the computer, you get to communicate without outside distractions. It's a one-on-one conversation, even if it's not in person. For some, it's easier to open up that way."

Brooks found and fell for LaSota while scanning profiles at true.com. He winked at her, or sent a message expressing his interest, on Sept. 8. When she didn't reply, he kept winking for four months. Finally, in January, LaSota decided to answer back.

Romance soon erupted between "number1umpire" and "chardonlady," their match-service monikers.

Sparks flew as fingers danced across computer keyboards. Despite sitting at desks 320 miles apart, they grew closer with each hour. They chatted online for five hours that first night, and seven the next while sharing their life stories. Then Brooks took a chance.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" he e-mailed.

The proposal followed.

Everything took off from there. Brooks quit his factory job and drove to Northeast Ohio to meet and move in with his future wife. The couple set a wedding date of May 21 . . . then moved it up to March 11 . . . and then moved it up to Valentine's Day.

"At this point, why wait?" LaSota said.

LaSota's family is still in shock but trying to be supportive, says her mother, Jan Konte, 67, of Eastlake. She called the rapid romance a tad worrisome: "I think they both need their heads examined."

Internet love tends to move fast, however: A survey showed that 72 percent of couples who met and married through match.com did so within a year, according to Online Dating Magazine. That's double the rate of those who met through more traditional means.

**LaSota said she's not concerned about moving along so fast with someone she's known for little more than a month. True.com does a criminal background and marriage check on dating applicants before allowing them to post profiles on the Web site.**

"My mother asked me, 'What if this guy is just doing this to take you for all you're worth?' " LaSota said. "I said, 'Mom, I live in a trailer. What's he going to take?' "

The couple, sitting together on a couch, laughed as LaSota recounted the conversation. Then they snuggled closer.

They're still getting to know each other and working out small details. (Neither, for instance, likes the way the other squeezes the toothpaste tube.) They do a lot of talking on the way to work. LaSota, who is the executive secretary to the director at John Carroll University's library, drops Brooks off at his manufacturing job every day.

LaSota and Brooks say they're excited about the learning and adjustment process.

"Sometimes," LaSota said, "you just have to take a chance."

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