



2009 TOP SINGLES SINGULARLY COOL

Winnowing 314 reader-submitted entries down to just over a dozen Top Singles this year was an incredibly challenging process. But we're proud to present the 16 we chose. From a fashion designer turned local boutique owner to a radio host we're guessing you may have heard of, this crop of singles is blessed with the kind of energy that makes startling things possible.

Selections by the SLM Staff

Written by Margaret Bauer

Photographs by John Fedele



KEVIN COLEMAN, 37

Independent film director and professor, North St. Louis

Leave it to a director to make a special request. Kevin Coleman's sole stipulation for our interview: "Please have chocolate. I usually open up with a Snickers bar in my stomach." We were more than happy to oblige.

See, although Coleman's quite accomplished, with a master's degree in directing from the ultraselective American Film Institute, a visiting assistant professorship at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, an adjunct professorship at St. Louis Community College–Forest Park, and two Coleman Entertainment films in the works, he's incredibly humble. His sleek designer sunglasses—one of his few indulgences—are the camouflage of a deeply shy man.

A Snickers simply serves to put this sweetie at ease. "It just calms me down. I don't know why," he says, noting that he's more nervous one-on-one than he ever is in front of a 200-person lecture, where he can plot everything out in advance.

The St. Louisan's approach to filmmaking is equally unpretentious. "You don't need a lot of special effects. You just want really good actors and a good story," he says. That philosophy got him noticed at AFI, where he directed *Snapshot*, a film that ultimately showed at a half-dozen festivals, garnering several awards.

On dating: "I'm easy to get along with; however, my work is very important to me. And I like women who have things going on in their lives, too," he says. "I don't want to be the center of their universe. I just want to brighten it."

SHANE COHN, 29

St. Louis alderman, Dutchtown

When Shane Cohn took office earlier this year in the 25th Ward, he became the second-youngest member of the Board of Aldermen—and made history as its first openly gay member. He's also making good on an uncommon pledge to his constituents: Although the city charter only provides part-time support for the position, he says, "I'm looking at doing this for probably a good two years full time."

It takes a unique commitment to the community and social justice to do what Cohn does—as well as a strong ability to keep things in perspective. To that end, he tries to do semiannual cleansing fasts and recently completed the Food Outreach hunger challenge, living on just \$29 for a week. "I may be targeted around my sexual orientation, but I'm certainly privileged as relates to my gender and my race," he says. "So that journey continues every day."

It's also tough to lose perspective when you're in near-constant contact with constituents. "I think I sent out like 9,000 text messages last month," he says. In Cohn's rare downtime, paintball, archery, bowling, cooking (his tomato lemon cream lasagna takes six hours to make), perusing local art, and sampling St. Louis cuisines are all fair game.

On dating: "When the Internet came around, it was like this explosive force in terms of the dating scene in the gay community. And when I was younger, I was very much trying to date online and had profiles out there and whatever," he says. "It's kind of weird as an elected official. It's not exactly a prop."

JENNIFER GNERLICH, 31

Surgical resident, Central West End

If there's anything we've learned recently, it's that doctors often have some surprising hidden talents. Jennifer Gnerlich's no exception: The Barnes–Jewish physician previously did theater for about 10 years in college and med school and co-founded a nonprofit theater group, Knock 'Em Dead, as a second-year med student at U. Chicago. She was even scouted at one point to be a professional actor.

Music is also key. During her second year of residency, she took the opportunity to experience the Bonnaroo music festival in Tennessee. But these days, she says, her musical tastes lean toward techno and hip-hop.

Cue something else we didn't know: Surgeons like to listen to music while they operate. And now that Gnerlich's a sixth-year resident, she usually gets to control the radio. "Personally, I have to have a good beat to stay awake and continue assisting when I'm on for 30 hours straight," she says. The beat goes on out of the OR, too—she loves heading out to the clubs, including Pepper Lounge and Mandarin.

On her days off, the movie-trivia buff has also been known to watch up to three movies in a row—in different theaters. But despite having such modern tastes, technologically, she says, "I'm pretty Amish. My friends always laugh—like, I literally didn't get a cellphone until two years ago."

On dating: Residency can make dating difficult. But she'd like to make it happen. "I'm off every other weekend, so it might actually turn out to be really good," she says. "That would be exciting, just to see what prospects were out there."

LAUREL NOEL, 52

Fitness club director, Ballwin

When Laurel Noel first walked into The Club at Chesterfield, it was as a member, not a staffer. But she was immediately hooked. "I just felt totally at home," she says.

During her first career as a travel agent, Noel took an aerobics class and quickly decided to become a certified yoga and fitness instructor herself. She soon opened her own center in Kansas City, the better to spend time with her three young daughters (now in their twenties). When the family moved to Indianapolis, she started a new center. But upon relocating here 10 years ago, she joined The Club instead—then couldn't help getting more involved.

"Other than being a backup dancer for The Temptations or, you know, Phil Collins—which would be my dream job—it's a perfect job for me," says Noel. Music is an important part of the package. "I grew up out in the country, and we had this big piano," she recalls. Of five siblings, she alone kept playing, inspired by her father's love of jazz. Now she and her daughters regularly attend concerts together.

The Georgia native's next goal: "People think I'm a dork, but I really want to learn to play banjo," she says. "I hope there are female banjo players out there!"

On dating: "I've learned that there are just a lot of interesting people out there that I enjoy getting to know. That's what's important to me," she says. "If somebody can bring something interesting that I can learn or that I can share with them, to me that's cool."



STACEY WEHE, 27

Architect and writer, University City

These days, Stacey Wehe lives in a perfectly normal apartment, with a balcony facing the Loop and the dartboards of Blueberry Hill (the “dart hustler” once played in a league) just a few blocks away. It’s a far cry from the structure her military family (her dad’s a Marine) once occupied in rural Illinois: an almost entirely off-the-grid earth-shelter home.

“It’s kind of cool to talk about it now, like, ‘Yeah, I used to live in an earth-shelter home,’” she says. “But at the time, I hated it. I was going through puberty, and the house was torture. We didn’t have any air conditioning, and I could not straighten my hair for the life of me.”

After graduating from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with high honors, though, the self-described “eco-nerd” began to come into her own. Now the Mackey Mitchell Associates architect works with environmental-justice organizations across the country, and this fall she’s giving a series of national conference presentations on the importance of “green” design in schools. This pescatarian former band section-leader and scholastic-bowl team member with a penchant for architectural conversation is making geeky look great.

On dating: “I’m like the queen of bad ideas in trying to meet people,” she laughs. “For a while I kept trying to pick up people at the grocery store. And it just didn’t work. My way of flirting is like, ‘So...did you hear about that new Buckminster Fuller exhibit at the museum?’ I don’t know how to flirt at all.”

MATTHEW FRY, 30

Criminal defense attorney, University City

We didn’t know it was possible to own more than 20 pairs of designer jeans and not be a diva, but Matthew Fry showed us otherwise. For this hardworking trial lawyer, fashion’s a familial passion—his parents are in the biz.

His love of football, though, trumps all. Fry missed the sport so much in law school that he volunteered as a high-school coach. This is his first year off since then—so of course he’s gone and joined a fantasy football league. We can’t blame him: His firm shares a box with CAA Sports, home of superagents Tom Condon and Ben Dogra, so he’s gotta know his stuff. “They’re the top agents in the world,” he says. “It’s really a lot of fun to sit and talk to them.”

When he’s not reading up on sports law, he’s immersed in work, often pulling 70-plus-hour weeks, including weekends. “I actually find work to be relaxing,” he says. But he does take time out to ride his motorcycle (he’s on No. 5), grab drinks at Bar Napoli, watch movies (admittedly, often while reviewing crime reports), peruse the weekly R&B Top 100 on iTunes, write poetry, and even take his friend’s pit bull (he’s its “uncle”) to the vet.

On dating: His promise to the ladies: “If you get nervous when you meet somebody, I will do enough things in the first five minutes that you will not be nervous,” he says. “You might be like, ‘Well, I don’t know if I want to talk to this person again,’ but you definitely won’t be nervous!”

PATRICK BROWN, 24

Mayor’s community works coordinator, Tower Grove South

Patrick Brown has a way-cool job. He’s the youngest person on Mayor Francis Slay’s staff—possibly the youngest ever hired to work in that office—and has the ear of some of the city’s most powerful people. But the lifelong St. Louisan says it’s not exactly like working in the West Wing. “City government is probably a little less glamorous,” he says. “It’s not always that exciting, but it’s something that needs to be done.”

Still, as Mayor Slay’s “body man” at events, Brown occupies a position central to city politics—and carries himself with a seriousness befitting the position. Well, most of the time, anyway. We were definitely amused to see his recent Twitter battle with the mayor: “iPRB: @MayorSlay & I are tweeting @ the same time & seeing how quickly the tweets come across our twitter apps.”

When your primary focus is encouraging twentysomething professionals to engage with the city, though, it helps to have a sense of humor. (Ask him about the sombreros he keeps in his car.) Not to mention a fine fashion sense: The former Express manager fully understands the subtle messages even the knot in one’s tie can send. “I think there’s a lot to be said for someone who pays attention to details,” he says.

On dating: Brown’s job is a major commitment. A word of caution to prospective dates: “If it seems like somebody is kinda going down that road, I just throw it out there, like, ‘Hey, you know, I’m gonna be the most noncommittal person on the face of the planet right now.’”

DANICA MATHES, 33

Entertainment and intellectual property attorney, Brentwood

Danica Mathes is, in her words, “the ultimate lister.” As one of only a few entertainment lawyers in the Midwest (who regularly works with clients like Nelly and Chingy), the owner of Mathes Law and Sidebar Entertainment Consulting has to stay incredibly organized—even if that means finding tiny scraps to scribble on in a pinch. “I’m switching gears all the time,” she says. “So if I don’t write something down, it’s likely that it doesn’t come back except in the middle of the night, when I bolt up in bed and have to write it down.”

The phrase “thrives on the pace” comes to mind. “I’m better at meeting deadlines and getting things knocked out if I’ve got 50 million things to do, as opposed to just five,” she says. When she’s not working or teaching law at Wash. U., she says, “I guess to wind down I like to cook. That’s actually therapeutic and relaxing to me.” She also does yoga; golfs; hangs out with her *bichon frisé*, Marley (not, she stresses, named for the book or movie); and makes sure to arrange regular outings for drinks with friends.

A former music and communications double major, Mathes trained for most of her life as a violinist and singer and also worked as an NBC TV reporter for a time before deciding to study law. Her most recent acquisition: a cello, which she plans to teach herself to play in her spare time.

On dating: Anyone who “smokes like a Conehead, takes himself too seriously, isn’t at least as tall as me (6-foot), or catcalls from a moving vehicle,” says Mathes, had best look elsewhere.



MIKE WEISS, 40.5

Bicycle-store owner and competitive cyclist, University City

Mike Weiss' life is a study in synchronicity, the result, perhaps, of a self-confessed "possible bad habit of not turning down projects or challenges." Take the circumstances of our interview. As we speak, the owner of the Loop's Big Shark Bicycle and president of the Missouri Bicycle Racing Association is driving back from staffing the Tour of Missouri in Rolla, where he's made a new friend: "the mystery beagle."

He found the little guy walking along the highway and, after a five-day wait, adopted him for his parents—so the beagle's in the back seat. It's happened before. At home, he has three pets ("cats and dogs living together") acquired similarly, all of which he's allergic to. "I just can't look away," he says.

Weiss began work as a corporate architect, but soon realized he enjoyed his part-time bike-shop gig much more. At age 23, he opened Big Shark. "Getting into the cycling industry has introduced me to people who I'd only read about," he says. "I don't think there are many industries where you can say, 'OK, I'm going to get into computers and meet Bill Gates and then go straight to Silicon Valley.'"

In his off hours, he heads to Duff's for the chicken Marsala (he's a little obsessed) and tries to catch time with his 12-year-old son, August—who he says is becoming quite the Renaissance kid himself.

On dating: Weiss' schedule is structured around biking; he rides 250 to 300 miles a week and is often called on to staff local races and events. "Being self-employed in an industry that is busiest at night and on weekends is a given," he says. "So understanding the architecture helps!"

JULIE STOTLAR, 26

Boutique owner and fashion designer, Tower Grove

By 2008, designer Julie Stotlar had reached an enviable position in the fashion world, making the leap from creating men's underwear for Perry Ellis to designing (and even serving as the in-house model for) Old Navy's Sweetheart jeans. There, she oversaw the entire production process from start to finish, including the factories in Latin America where pants are hand-sanded to exacting specifications. "Seeing my jeans featured in TV commercials and on celebrities is still a rush," she says.

At night, she often partied in Miami, which led to a few particularly memorable celebrity snafus. Once, she says, Dennis Rodman tried rather insistently to pull her away from a bash (he failed); another time, she spoke with actor Dylan McDermott for a full *four hours* before realizing his name wasn't, in fact, Dean (that would be Tori Spelling's husband).

But the glamor of Gap turned meaningless in an instant when her nephew, Henry, was born. Within days, the native St. Louisan was clamoring to move back home. She couldn't bear to miss seeing her brother's son grow up. It was then that she decided to buy Byrd Style Lounge in downtown Clayton—and begin an entirely new chapter in her career.

On dating: Stotlar tends to be shy and stresses that she needs a guy who will pull her out of her shell. At the same time, she says, "I'm an extremely independent person. I'll never 'settle down' and drive a minivan. But I'm looking for someone whose life can fall effortlessly into mine."

ANGELLA SHARPE, 30

TV reporter and host, South County

When you work the places Angella Sharpe has, it's easy to have fun at work. She's served as the end-of-game host for the St. Louis Blues on KPLR, a reporter for STLTV, and a host on KMOV's *St. Louis Country*—sometimes all in the same week.

We're guessing her career choice came as no surprise to her parents. "When I was really little, I wanted to be Johnny Carson," she says. After studying elementary education in college, the former Miss Webster Groves contestant returned to entertainment when she landed on a little-known WEtv reality show called *American Princess*.

"When I signed up, I thought they were going to spoil you and show you around and treat you like a princess," she says. "But what it actually was was Paul Burrell—Princess Diana's butler—teaching you how to be English, basically." She laughs. "I'm definitely not the tea-party type."

Sharpe loves hockey—but her dream job is to host the CMT *Top 20 Countdown*. She learned to do country line-dancing in college at Wild Country—and honed her people-watching skills in the process. Another goal? To tour the world's "biggest things," e.g., the World's Largest Catsup Bottle in Collinsville.

On dating: Now *this* surprised us: "As a general rule, I don't really get asked out a whole lot," she says. "Maybe as a joke, like I'll be walking through the concourse and somebody's like, 'Hey Angie, will you go out with me?' and I'll be like, 'Sure.' But nobody's seriously asking me out."

CASEY CATHCART, 26

Investment banking associate, St. Charles

When we spoke to Casey Cathcart, he and his Stern Brothers colleagues were in the final stages of completing several major bond deals. It's complex business—but regardless of how busy things get, he always makes time to unwind on the weekends.

You'll rarely catch this Kansas City-born cutie close to home, though. Miso Lounge and Barrister's in Clayton and the wineries of far West County have captured his heart. They're prime spots for exercising a gift for gab true to his family's Scottish heritage. "I can sit down with anybody and just start talking to them," he says. "I went to a restaurant Sunday to watch the Rams game...sat down, struck up a conversation with the people next to me, and before I knew it, it was like a full-table discussion."

His heritage also underpins one of his major goals: to visit the castles of Europe. Though Cathcart Castle was torn down in the 1980s—"It wasn't anything huge; it was more like a watchtower," he says—the idea of it caught his imagination.

"I'm kind of a nerd at heart," he confesses. Though he knew by middle school that he wanted to go into finance, his interest in engineering led him to get a dual degree in math and computer science before embarking on his MBA. He still builds his own computers from parts and someday hopes to own a saltwater aquarium—possibly with a small shark.

On dating: "I guess the last girl I dated, she thought I was very well-mannered," he says amusedly, a slight Western accent in evidence. "Even to the waitress, I'm like, 'Thank you,' 'Yes, ma'am,' 'Please.'"



SHANNA SAMSON, 33

Director of strategic planning and business development, Normandy

Upon congratulating Shanna Samson on her selection, we can tell even over the phone that she's blushing. "I'm a little embarrassed by it, actually. I'm feeling bashful," she says, laughing. Though the single mother (her daughter, Imena, is 4) has a high-powered career as a director at the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, she's a sensitive soul.

And a passionate one. After a childhood in western Missouri, "cutting sunflowers down out of the cornfield and riding a tractor, full-fledged farmer's daughter," Samson moved to St. Louis for college. She considered a career in holistic medicine before following a passion for civil rights into a second master's degree in social work, studying in Ghana along the way. Soon she scored a research position with the St. Louis Black Leadership Roundtable—for which she still compiles an annual report on the African-American achievement gap.

Samson works hard to maintain balance. Each year, she hosts an exchange student, exposing Imena to the world's cultures, and serves as a community representative for the AYUSA exchange program. Also important: eating well (mostly organic fruits and vegetables), exercising, meditation, reading, enjoying positive hip-hop—and helping feed backyard friends Layla (a bunny), Nutty (a squirrel), and Sala (a flower). "Those are my daughter's 'pets,' so she always gets excited when we see them," she says.

On dating: Her celebrity dream date? "Ben Harper, who would be smitten by me. He'd break out his guitar and sing me an impromptu song from the heart, and we'd slow-dance under the moonlight," she says.

KEATH HAUSER, 40

Certified fitness trainer, Des Peres

Some writers might be intimidated by Keath Hauser, whose photo showed him standing behind a monster black Harley, rippling arms akimbo. Not us. (Though we *did* make sure to interview him by phone.)

More seriously, though, it's clear: This guy's truly passionate about helping others. As president of Shark Fitness and founder of the non-profit Saint Louis Military Officer Support Foundation, not only does he help people get in shape, his training also saves lives.

"A friend of mine was a police officer, and he called me one day, very upset with himself. He'd tried to take a suspect down, and he felt like the suspect got the better of him," he recalls. "Had his partner not showed up, he felt like he would have lost the confrontation." But by the time the officer faced such a situation again, he'd gone through Hauser's training—and easily prevailed. The experience inspired Hauser to develop his boot camps.

These days, he works 70 to 95 hours a week, including time (pro bono) helping military men and women learn fitness and weaponry skills. Time off is spent with his recently adopted German shepherd/boxer mix, Gus, riding his motorcycle, and staying in touch via iPhone—also, says the licensed pilot, he'd like to resume flying helicopters at some point.

On dating: "I'm a very straightforward guy. I wake up looking forward to each day; it would be nice to have someone around to ruin that... just kidding," he quips. For the right lady, he says, "I will make time. I would certainly have to make time."

PAUL WEGMAN, 30

Communication systems engineer, St. Charles

It's not often that you meet someone who's experienced all that Paul Wegman has. He served in the Air Force in Italy for six years, taking a number of notable side trips, including three weeks in Thailand, where he became scuba-certified, and diving trips to Egypt, where he once dined with a desert tribe. (Lesson learned both places: Don't eat the street meat.)

Upon his return to the U.S. in 2004, he settled into civilian life—only to be diagnosed, in 2007, with testicular cancer. It was a shock, to say the least. "When I first heard the words, I was definitely very scared," he says. "You kind of have those few dark moments where all the worst things go through your mind. You're like, 'Am I gonna live?' You've never thought about cancer in your life, at least I hadn't until it really hit me." After aggressive chemotherapy, however, he was thankfully diagnosed cancer-free.

These days, he's living life to the fullest. Sushi, seafood, and steak are all favorite indulgences, especially with a good glass of *vino*. And to satisfy his need for speed—skiing's a favorite sport, but not always in-season—he bought himself an awesome 30th birthday present: an '06 Corvette C6.

His future plans are equally ambitious: skydiving, scuba diving with a whale shark, and earning his helicopter license and MBA.

On dating: "The Gardens at Malmaison in St. Albans is a place I like to go for a special occasion with a special someone," he says. "It's romantic in a fairy-tale kind of way."

TAMMIE HOLLAND, 38

Radio personality, North County

Speaking to Tammie Holland by phone, we can hear her 3-year-old daughter, Meadow, happily chatting in the background. For breakfast, she's having bacon, egg whites—and gummy bears, a special interview-day request.

As cohost of KMJM-FM's *The Tony Scott Show* for five years, on the radio almost every day (she even gave birth on-air), Holland's got things locked down tight. Breakfast is with her daughter. Lunch... Holland laughs. "When I say I take my lunch in Forest Park, I run my lunch," she says. "So I run the park, and I make it back in time for my shift."

Holland's mastered making the most of her time. But whenever she begins to feel a little too on top of things, she reminds herself to keep it real. "Other people will pump you up, and they'll tell you how great they think you are," she says. "But I've always been able to remain grounded, because I have a family that keeps me that way."

When that fails? She always remembers what her mother told her to calm her nerves before her first big celebrity interview. "She says to me, 'Tammie, Patti LaBelle pees just like you do.' And I said, 'Yes, Mom. She does.'" Definitely words to live by.

On dating: "People ask me, 'Do you have a boyfriend?' Well, I've got thousands of them, and they call me every day," she says of her fans. "I've got thousands of sisters, too." 🐾

MARGARET BAUER is SLM's associate editor, as well as senior editor of AT HOME. She's taken. To read more about our singles, visit stlmag.com.