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## Giving the Gift of Experience

### Residents of McLean and Great Falls Open 'Excitations' Just in Time for the Holiday Season

By Aranya Tomseth

Every Christmas, Joe Kelty has a hard time figuring out what to give to his parents and to his wife's parents.

"If they need something they go out and get it," said Kelty. "They have everything they want." This year, Kelty's wife stumbled on the perfect solution to the problem.

"My wife and my daughter were at the McLean Community Center at the craft fair that they had this past week, and they were looking for gifts that were a little different and unique for folks that are hard to buy for," said Kelty, who lives just around the corner from the center.

Kelty's wife and daughter had discovered Excitations, a business that was recently opened by Great Falls resident Ian Landy, and McLean residents Nancy Lamberton and Kim AuBuchon. Excitations offers people the chance to give the gift of an experience and the offerings run the gamut from a romantic day for two at the spa, to a secret agent driving adventure. Joe Kelty was immediately taken with the concept.



**In addition to its Web site, Excitations runs a kiosk in the new expansion wing of Tysons Corner Center.**

"In my family I say 'hey, you e-mail me a list of wishes and I'll tell you what I want,'" said Kelty. "Well... I want a new driveway and new shingles for my roof and that's not something you can wrap up. Nowadays I tend to bail out and say just give me a gift certificate, but this is like a gift certificate multiplied in different directions because you not only get to pick what you want, but you also get to pick from any number of experiences."

Ian Landy and Kim AuBuchon came up with the concept for Excitations as a result of their extensive traveling overseas.

"This is a very established market over in the UK and in some parts of Australia," said AuBuchon, Chief Operating Officer for Excitations. "When we looked around in the U.S. there was no one doing it, and we thought this is the perfect place to do it because the

market is a lot bigger, the weather is favorable and the geography is diverse."



The company was founded in early 2005 and was launched on the Internet and in retail locations in the fall. Customers can order the experiences via the Web site or visit its kiosk at Tysons Corner Center. "Experience Cards" are packaged in red boxes and come complete with all the details and information of the particular outing.

"I would say that honestly, the biggest challenge has been getting the word out," said AuBuchon. "Experience gift giving doesn't click with people automatically, but when you sit down with them and give them a minute or two, they respond so enthusiastically." Although its founders hope to take Excitations nationwide next year, it is currently focused on experiences in the immediate area.

"You don't have to go to France, you don't have to go Arizona — everything is within 250 miles," said AuBuchon. "We are continuing to grow and evolve and we are adding 10-15 new experiences a week."

Excitations also offers a number of "Circle Packages," certificates which allow the recipient to choose from experiences within a designated price range.

"We got the blue circle for my parents and for my wife's parents," said Kelty. "They get along really well, so the idea is going to be, hey you both got the blue package, you can do it together, or go separately."

AuBuchon says she is frequently asked, "what is the most exciting experience?" but finds it hard to answer the question.

"It really varies so much," said AuBuchon. "Some people are really excited to do airplane acrobatics because that is their thing, and other people are really excited to go around with a professional photographer and take photos. It really is all over which is what is so great about it — it appeals to everyone."

She herself has not been able to pinpoint a favorite experience.

"Every time I go on one I think that it's my favorite, and I then I go on another, and I think that one is my favorite," said AuBuchon.

Kelty says he is looking forward to giving the Excitations certificate to his parents and seeing what they choose.

"My rule of thumb is that when I'm buying a gift for someone, and I buy them something that I want, then I know I've done a good job," said Kelty.

\*For more information, visit the Excitations web site at [www.excitations.com](http://www.excitations.com).