

notes that "in this heated-up economy, nobody knows if the trend is for real."

Much of this activity comes from the sale of gift certificates and use by wedding and corporate groups. Owners say gift certificates make up 20 percent of their business.

"My customers don't need any more things. So I give them gift certificates for services," says one stockbroker. "A woman I know has seven kids. She would think it was decadent to treat herself to a massage, but if I give her a gift certificate, she'll use it and enjoy it."

James Moore, 33, assistant general manager at Hotel Metro, came to his first spa experience with a gift certificate. Now he goes regularly for massages.

"I have a high-stress job," says Moore. "I need to take time for myself. I try to get in a massage every two to three weeks."

*Suddenly, the touching is extra warm and silky, like liquid on my back, my arms, my hands. I am in a dazed state, not exactly sleeping but in that neighborhood. She whispers that I should turn over. She offers a pillow for my head and one under my knees. More hot stones - on my chest, arms, forehead. More long, soothing strokes. Even more relaxed.*

#### TREATMENTS: FACIALS

Facials are the second most requested service and are growing in use by men.

The standard European facial aims to cleanse, tone, exfoliate and moisturize. Variations may include use of certain botanical oils and aromatherapy.

Glycolic acid peels and microdermabrasion (approved by the FDA for spas in 1997) need to be approached with care. Some spas won't touch these treatments, feeling that they belong in the medical domain. It's a big issue, says Susan Haise of The Day Spa, who sits on the state licensing board and who insists limits should be imposed. Yet there is a demand, and some spas, such as Anton's, offer a wide variety of these procedures.

Estheticians are required to have 450 hours of training, which takes about 3½ months of study.

Bachelorette party planners are increasingly opting for a good rubdown instead of a night on the town. A weekday visit to the locker room at Grand Geneva Spa this summer turned up 18 towel-wrapped women in their 20s feting a bride-to-be, chatting, sipping cool drinks, taking turns having various services and having a very good time.

Savvy businesspeople will bring clients or employees to a spa.

However, just as we are learning that it's

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es are cooked on the premises and feature fresh, organic foods.

Here you can have an oxygen bath - sitting in a chamber (head out). Hair stylist K.C. Miller of Stella's tried it when he was stressed out from opening his new salon. Says Miller: "It realigns your brain. Then you're good for another 2,000 miles."

Myota, with 30 years of experience in health services, stresses attention to the client's overall health, using detailed questioning. She urges continuing self-care, with personal fitness training on site and classes in tai chi, yoga, meditation and various types of healing. Stressing the competence of her staff, she offers a post-graduate course for her estheticians, which is also open to others. "Just out of school, they know so little," she says.

Upstairs in a new wing, there are eight treatment rooms (there are no locker rooms; if you have several treatments, your clothes are carried with you in a garment bag).

*Impression: Myota is intense in her commitment to the Vesta offerings as the way to better health. I don't know if I could take it all that seriously, but it sure couldn't hurt to try. Her passion has a convincing charm.*

*In Excelsis Day Spa, 1414 E. Paradise Dr., West Bend, 262-335-1535.*

Another distinctly unique site. Owner Jeannine Peters makes her living as a building contractor in West Bend and considers owning a day spa an avocation, a way to live out her fascination with good health and wellness.

In Excelsis (Latin for "in the highest") has two adjoining businesses: a health store and fitness center.

Peters is taking the spa's development slowly and carefully, with full attention to choosing which services she wants to offer. The centerpiece of the spa segment is a large atrium with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking an unspoiled grassy landscape. Here, there's a juice bar, a mixed-gender whirlpool and tables and chairs for dining.

The ambiance is friendly and down-home, the clientele is about 85 percent local and appointments need to be booked a week or two in advance.

The mood is comfortably spiritual, complete with an 11-circle meditation labyrinth on the grounds that is available to spa users at no additional charge.

The spa has four treatment rooms and a two-chair hair salon tucked away in a corner of the building.

*Impression: Peters is another passionate one, a good quality in this business. But she's a bit more laid-back. Though she's into New Age in a big way, she won't intimidate you with it. She just wants to make you feel comfy and at home, honey. And she will.*

#### CONVENIENCE SPAS

*The Day Spa at the Skin Institute (formerly Aveda Lifestyle Salon and Day Spa), 325 E. Chicago St., 227-2888; [www.skininstitute.com](http://www.skininstitute.com).*

This spa is associated with The Institute of Beauty and Wellness (formerly The Skin Institute), 342 N. Water St., a school where many of the estheticians working in area spas are trained (and where hair, skin, nail and massage services are available at half price.)

Susan Haise, owner of both locations, has been in the game for seven years and clearly knows what she's doing. Observes Haise, who serves on the state board for licensing: "I train half of my competition."

The Day Spa has a driving salon component and a sophisticated, busy, urban ambiance, serving an average of 150 to 200 people a day, including hair and nails; 75 to 85 are served daily in the spa alone. Groups of up to 20 can be accommodated, and there are 36 women's lockers.

The facility offers two Jacuzzi tubs, steam room, wet room with vichy shower and scotch hose and nine other treatment rooms. It's staffed by 10 massage therapists and 10 estheticians. In the back room, a savvy staff keeps the computers humming with information on every client.

Here, too, the policy is "value added," so some services may come with extras like hot packs or a complimentary steam, beverages and pretzels or a makeup touch-up.

*American Demographics* observes that most day spa activity is on the coasts, but The Day Spa as an exception to the Midwest dearth. "[It] is booked weeks in advance... with a high percentage of... services and a very busy clientele looking to be pampered and rejuvenated...."

The main complaint by some customers is not being able to get appointments when and with whom they desire. Bookings run four to six weeks out.

*Impression: Haise does a great job - she's efficient, thorough, knows her stuff. If this is as far as you can travel, do it. But no matter how you cut it, with 36 women's lockers, this is going to be a community event, not a solo, soulful journey.*