



Photography: John D. Simmons

It's

a warm summer evening in Uptown Charlotte, N.C.

Rush-hour traffic has all but cleared. Replacing the departing workers are baseball fans making their way, on foot and by scooter, to Truist Field, to see the Triple-A Charlotte Knights take on the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp.

In adjacent Romare Bearden Park, an oasis of green surrounded by towering buildings and sports venues, there's a photo shoot going on. It's not a local celebrity like Michael Jordan, Dale Earnhardt Jr., or LaMelo Ball. No, this photographer is snapping shots of four community pharmacy superstars – **Amina Abubakar, Ashley Branham, Josh Rimany, and Joe Moose.**

Abubakar, Branham, Rimany, and Moose are, in the strictest sense of the word, competitors. They're all pharmacy owners in the greater Charlotte area, but when they gather on this mild summer evening, they greet each other warmly – not as adversaries, but as trusted friends and colleagues. Before long, they're swapping stories and sharing laughs.

A team of rivals? Not exactly.

"I think what we have in common is an entrepreneurial spirit," says Rimany, who owns Dilworth Drug & Wellness Center, about 2.5 miles from the Uptown park. "We have our own mindsets, but we do things in different flavors."

Pictured from left to right: Ashley Branham, Amina Abubakar, Josh Rimany, and Joe Moose.

If it's a competition, Branham says, "it's a healthy competition."

North Carolina is a state that invites pharmacy innovation. For one thing, members of the state board of pharmacy are elected by peers. They're not political appointees, says Moose. "They recognize the value of community pharmacy here. The laws in North Carolina are set up so you can really practice in the patient's best interest here."

CAROLINA ON OUR MIND

**IN NORTH CAROLINA, A PASSION FOR INNOVATION
BRINGS PHARMACISTS TOGETHER .**

All articles written by Jayne Cannon, NCPA director of communications



NCPA 2021 ANNUAL CONVENTION

“ONE REASON NORTH CAROLINA HAS SOME OF THE HIGHEST NUMBERS OF INDEPENDENT PHARMACIES IS BECAUSE OF THE INNOVATION OF PHARMACY OWNERS IN NORTH CAROLINA AND THEIR WILLINGNESS TO WORK TOGETHER. THAT COMBINATION OF VISION AND CAMARADERIE HAS PRODUCED SOME OF THE MOST CREATIVE PHARMACY OWNERS IN THE COUNTRY.” – DOUGLAS HOEY

CHARLOTTE, N.C. • OCT. 9-12



The Charlotte Convention Center is conveniently located near convention hotels and local attractions, including the NASCAR Hall of Fame just next door.

Moose is a North Carolina native and fourth generation pharmacist. Abubakar, Branham, and Rimany moved to North Carolina at the beginning of their careers and liked it so much they decided to stay.

Abubakar came to North Carolina from pharmacy school in Philadelphia. A friend was offered a chance to come to Charlotte for a job interview and declined the opportunity. “Tell them I’ll come,” Abubakar told her friend. She came and never left. “I fell in love with Charlotte the minute I got here,” she says. “The people were great. The weather was great.” What she didn’t count on in the beginning was how open Charlotte was to new ideas. “I was surprised there was so much innovation,” she says.

“North Carolina has a long history of pharmacy entrepreneurship alongside a history of expanding scope of practice and care team collaborations with local primary care providers. Charlotte, in particular, has been an incubator for pharmacy services delivery and has a deep bench of professional leadership,” says Troy Trygstad, executive director of CPESN® USA and vice president of pharmacy provider partnerships at Community Care of North Carolina, which is based in the Triangle of North Carolina, about 160 miles from Charlotte. In addition to running their own pharmacies in the Charlotte area, Moose and Branham work with CPESN; Branham as director of network development and Moose as director of strategy and luminary development.

Community Care of North Carolina and NCPA each hold a 50 percent stake in CPESN USA. The partnership, a clinically integrated, nationwide organization of local networks whose participating pharmacies are accountable for the care they



provide to patients, was formed in 2017 – more pharmacy innovation that was born in the Tar Heel State.

North Carolina ranks eighth among the 50 states in the number of independent pharmacies. NCPA CEO Douglas Hoey agrees that the relationships fostered among community pharmacy owners across the state makes North Carolina stand out. “One reason North Carolina has some of the highest numbers of independent pharmacies is because of the innovation of pharmacy owners in North Carolina and their willingness to work together,” Hoey says. “That combination of vision and camaraderie has produced some of the most creative pharmacy owners in the country. Pharmacy owners like Amina Abubakar and Joe Moose are successfully pioneering new ways for pharmacists to get paid — the key word there is successfully getting paid for services that are valuable to the rest of health care. That is a big key to the innovative successes in North Carolina. Pharmacists are working with other health care providers to determine which pharmacist services are of value.”

Moose says he doesn’t hesitate to reach out to his local colleagues. “I probably talk to Amina a couple of times a week,” he says. “We all collaborate and that raises the bar around us. Innovation attracts more innovation. We feed off each other.”

All this pharmacy innovation in a concentrated area reminds him of Silicon Valley, the global center of technology innovation in California’s Santa Clara Valley, Moose says.

“It just makes everyone better,” he says. “All those technology businesses in Silicon Valley only made the business bigger. There’s enough for everybody.”

Rimany agrees. When he looks at his local pharmacy colleagues, he says it inspires him.

“To me, ‘A’ players surround themselves with other ‘A’ players,” he says. “As I see it, if someone else can do it, I can do it.”

Rimany says he values the words of his pharmacy colleagues.

“When we learn from our peers, it’s experience-sharing, not advice.”

A photograph of Joe Moose, a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a white button-down shirt. He is standing in a pharmacy aisle, looking upwards and to the right, reaching for a product on a high shelf. The shelves are filled with various pharmaceutical products.

JOE MOOSE

“THAT’S NOT ABOUT FILLING PRESCRIPTIONS OR MAKING MONEY. IT’S ABOUT HELPING PEOPLE IN A LOT OF WAYS. MAYBE YOU SPONSOR A FREE LUNCH PROGRAM OR A CLOTHING DRIVE. YOU HELP TO MAKE THE COMMUNITY A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE FOR EVERYONE. TODAY, THAT’S WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WITH SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH.”



At Moose, it's all about building a health community

Joe Moose's pharmacy roots run deep.

His great-grandfather opened Moose Pharmacy in Mount Pleasant, N.C., in 1882. The original pharmacy is the "world headquarters" for Moose, which has expanded to seven other locations. Mount Pleasant is a small town (a population of just under 2,000) that's more than a little like Mayberry. And just as Mayberry folks came to Sheriff Andy for advice and counsel, Mount Pleasant residents have flocked to Moose Pharmacy for four generations.

Moose could never imagine any other line of work.

He began working in the pharmacy as a pre-teen, he says. "I saw how my dad ran his practice. I saw the care he took, the time he invested. And I saw the respect he was given."

Moose Pharmacy was, in many ways, ahead of its time in offering more than prescription dispensing to patients. In pharmacy school, Joe Moose found his idea of pharmacy practice was different than what his classmates envisioned. "A lot of the stuff we call clinical services we had been doing at Moose for 75 to 100 years," he says.

Moose and his brother and business partner, Whit Moose Jr., sat down to plan about 15 years ago when their father stepped down. They talked about their vision for the pharmacy. After a few days of discussion, they decided that it was simple: they wanted to take care of the community. Not long after, they found some

of their grandfather's papers in the basement, including one where he'd scribbled a motto: taking care of the community.

"His goal was a healthy community," Joe Moose says. "That's not about filling prescriptions or making money. It's about helping people in a lot of ways. Maybe you sponsor a free lunch program or a clothing drive. You help to make the community a better place to live for everyone. Today, that's what we talk about with social determinants of health."

His grandfather helped bring city water and sewer to Mount Pleasant. That's a way of taking care of the community, Moose says.

This kind of innovation was bound to come from community pharmacy, Moose says. "There is something about practicing in a rural setting. You don't have everything all around you. You learn to work with what you've got."

His family's longtime passion for community-based pharmacy value led Moose to a role with CPESN® USA, where he serves as director of strategy and luminary services. He's also lead community pharmacy coordinator for Community Care of North Carolina, where he has built a network of more than 200 high-quality community pharmacies that strive to offer enhanced value to payers.

"Your competition is not what you might imagine," Moose says. "It's not about filling a prescription cheaper than your neighbor does. The dollars aren't in the drugs. We need to convince payers that we are an investment in a healthy community. Using pharmacy services will keep people out of the ER and the hospital. Healthy people show up for work. We have to stand united to make this case."



THE CHARLOTTE EXPERIENCE I RECOMMEND

"Ride the rail! Take the Lynx and go to the South End. Go to a good restaurant – there are so many to choose from right on the rail line. Walk around a little. The area is lively and safe. Hit a few breweries. October will be a great time to sit outside with friends and enjoy the local craft beer scene."

– Joe Moose



AMINA ABUBAKAR

“IT WAS MY FIRST EXPOSURE TO INDEPENDENT PHARMACY. I LOVED THE PEOPLE AND THE RELATIONSHIPS.” SHE REMEMBERS BEING IMPRESSED BY PHARMACISTS HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH PATIENTS, NOT JUST FILLING PRESCRIPTIONS, AND HANDING THEM OFF TO A PHARMACY TECH.



Always looking for new opportunities

Amina Abubakar arrived in Charlotte in 2005, fresh out of pharmacy school. She needed a job and a chain drugstore offered one. She'd never been to Charlotte, but fortunately she liked it right away. The pace of the city, the people, and the climate were big attractions.

After two years with the chain, she connected with an independent pharmacy owner. Suddenly, she saw pharmacy in a whole new light.

"It was my first exposure to independent pharmacy," she says. "I loved the people and the relationships." She remembers being impressed by pharmacists having conversations with patients, not just filling prescriptions and handing them off to a pharmacy tech.

"I thought, 'Wow, nobody is stopping her from taking the time,'" she says.

Healing people had been a dream for Abubakar since her childhood in Kenya. Her interest in healing was piqued by local herbalists. "I'd see people come and they'd get a leaf to boil and then drink. And I'd think, 'Does this really work?' I was curious about why something would work or not work."

At the same time, HIV was raging in Kenya. She visited a hospital once where she saw dying HIV patients sleeping on the floor. Everyone was afraid to touch them. In those days, she said, "HIV was a death sentence. I wondered why there was no medicine to help them." Abubakar was determined to pursue pharmacy as a profession, but in Kenya, it's not that easy. Students are "assigned" to

a profession where they're needed. She knew she'd need to leave the country to pursue her pharmacy dream. Schoolmates and neighbors raised money to send her to America to study pharmacy.

In 2009, Abubakar opened Rx Clinic Pharmacy, specializing in treating HIV patients. The disease, once a certain death sentence, has changed since the early days, largely due to strides in pharmacy. Today, some patients achieve U=U status, which means that they have been able to achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load by taking antiretroviral therapy daily. U=U means that a patient has an undetectable level of virus and is therefore, untransmittable to others. That's something that was only a dream a few decades ago, Abubakar says.

A colleague recently commented that they are now attending weddings and baby showers, such a change from the days when they "always going to funerals."

Groundbreaking work and connection with patients are possible in an independent setting, she says. "There is room to innovate when you don't have barriers," she says.

When she came to North Carolina in 2005, she was surprised that there was so much room to innovate. "This is a welcoming environment for advancing the profession of pharmacy."

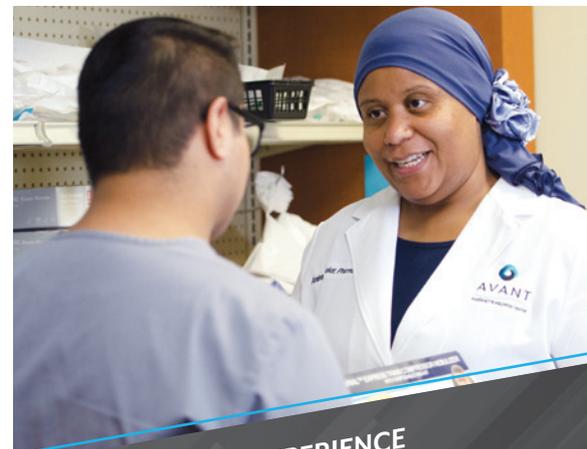
In 12 years, she's fostered a lot of relationships, and last year, she started asking herself what was next. Her answer centered around a question: "What if we caught these folks earlier?"

With that in mind, last month she turned an old Rite Aid into Avant Pharmacy and Wellness. She chose

the name Avant for a French term, "avant garde," which roughly means a "new and innovative style." Her new business offers "things you don't find at other pharmacies. We're always doing things that are different."

Her new space offers a medical clinic, functional medicine consults, travel health, home comfort safety and mobility, a compounding lab and a community classroom, just to name a few features.

She's looking ahead. "Every day we get to break a new glass ceiling."



THE CHARLOTTE EXPERIENCE
I RECOMMEND

"Enjoy the green space in Uptown. It's not just buildings everywhere. There are wonderful parks."

– Amina Abubakar

A portrait of Ashley Branham, a pharmacist, in a pharmacy setting. She has long blonde hair and is wearing a black sleeveless top with a name tag that says "Ashley".

ASHLEY BRANHAM

“I LOVED ANYTHING THAT INVOLVED SITTING DOWN WITH A PATIENT. I BECAME ACCOUNTABLE TO PATIENTS. YOU AREN'T MANAGING THEM; YOU'RE WALKING WITH THEM. EVERY DAY WAS DIFFERENT. IT WAS FUN TO BE AT WORK.” BRANHAM SAYS SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH CLINICAL SERVICES, WORKING WITH PATIENTS AND SEEING THEIR OUTCOMES IMPROVE.



Clinical services inspire new pharmacy owner

It would be fair to say that Moose Pharmacy changed **Ashley Branham's** life.

Branham, in her words, "stumbled into Moose Pharmacy" during a post-graduate rotation after she graduated from Campbell University School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. Until then, she planned a career in academia.

Branham grew up in Kentucky, the daughter of a family physician. She was interested in medical things and often spent time in the office with her dad. Her father shared a building with a pharmacist and over time, the practice of pharmacy caught her eye.

After graduating from Campbell in 2008, Branham completed a Community Pharmacy Residency and a Postgraduate Year 2 Community Pharmacy Residency with the University of North Carolina Eshelman School of Pharmacy and Moose Pharmacy.

It was during that residency that her future began to take shape. At Moose, she saw pharmacy in a different light. She was able to work with patients in a family medical setting. There was always something new to offer to patients. Medication therapy management was coming, and she was excited by that opportunity. She dived into implementing and enhancing clinical services such as immunizations, women's health consultations, insulin pump training, adherence, and disease state management at all of Moose Pharmacy's locations. She worked with patients and found a passion for clinical

services. She managed clinics, eventually becoming director of clinical services for the pharmacy.

"I loved anything that involved sitting down with a patient," she says. "I became accountable to patients. You aren't managing them; you're walking with them."

Every day was different, she says. "It was fun to be at work." Branham says she fell in love with clinical services, working with patients and seeing their outcomes improve. (Oh, and she fell in love with pharmacy owner Joe Moose, too. The two were married last month.)

If managing clinical services for seven pharmacies was not enough, Branham also works as director of network development at CPESN[®] USA and continues to mentor students at UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy. In January 2020, Branham realized a professional dream when she bought a Moose Pharmacy in Monroe, N.C., west of Charlotte. "After 11 years, I was ready," she says. "I am excited about creating this culture in a new community."

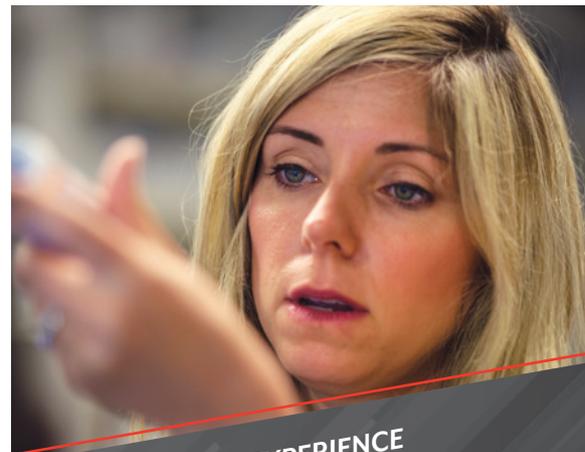
As ready as she felt, opening a pharmacy two months before a pandemic hit was a challenge in itself. "I don't think anything truly prepares you for (ownership)," she says. "You have to change your mindset."

Her pharmacy had a chance to connect with the community in a big way with COVID-19 vaccinations earlier this year. Branham worked with students at nearby Wingate University School of Pharmacy and they helped out as 200 people a day came to the pharmacy for vaccinations.

Moose Pharmacy is new to Monroe, but Branham says she's "in it for the long run."

Her goal is to keep community pharmacy sustainable by offering clinical services and patient care unlike anything they can find elsewhere.

"You have to tell people by your actions that you care about them and work really hard to gain their trust."



THE CHARLOTTE EXPERIENCE I RECOMMEND

"My favorite experiences are definitely around food! Have a drink at a rooftop bar. There are several, but I love Merchant and Trade. And for dinner, Sea Level."

– Ashley Branham



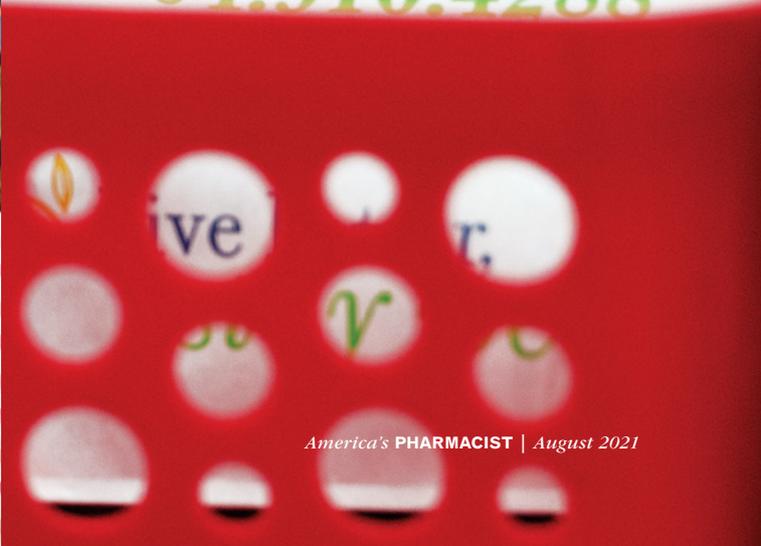
JOSH RIMANY

“IT’S CRITICAL THAT PHARMACISTS SELL THE VALUE OF THEIR SERVICES. IF SOMEONE VALUES IT, THEY WILL FIND A WAY TO PAY FOR IT. THEY ARE PAYING THEIR DOCTOR TO BE SICK AND TAKE MEDS FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIFE. OUR MESSAGE NEEDS TO BE THAT, WITH US, WHAT THEY’RE PAYING FOR IS THE FUTURE. A HEALTHIER FUTURE.”




DILWORTH
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Pharmacists need to know their value and share it

Two things in **Josh Rimany's** teen years influenced the rest of his life.

He became a cancer survivor, and he got a part-time job at CVS. Those two things have been the backdrop for a career that has taken him from his native Connecticut to Charlotte, from a job as a traditional chain pharmacist to one who considers himself a health strategist.

His work over the past 15 years has taught him that “most people don't want to be dependent on pills.”

To that end, Rimany practices “functional medicine” at Dilworth Drug & Wellness Center in Dilworth, a trendy, established neighborhood in Charlotte. He opened his doors and got married in the same month, a plan he doesn't recommend, he notes with a chuckle. (Both the marriage and the business have survived nicely.)

Rimany says “there's more to life than prescription drugs.” His goal is to talk with patients, ask them questions, and work toward healing what got them on the prescriptions in the first place. “The patient is the messenger,” he says. “We're the guide.”

Some pharmacists lament that the profession has changed. Indeed, it has, Rimany says, and that is a good thing. Patient care will always be his priority, but the days of a dispensing-dependent business are behind, he says. Rimany believes that independents must evolve to keep up.

“I believe that COVID-19 was a transformational shift for independents,” Rimany says. “We have to think beyond the pill. That engine is dying. Pharmacy has been rapidly changing, but COVID put an accelerant on it.

“So many people think we lack control, and they're right. We have to take back control. We need to concentrate on wellness. Think of it this way: if we focus on sickness, the PBMs are in control. If we focus on wellness, we're in control.”

Rimany says it's critical that pharmacists sell the value of their services. “If someone values it, they will find a way to pay for it,” he says. “They are paying their doctor to be sick and take meds for the rest of their life. Our message needs to be that, with us, what they're paying for is the future. A healthier future.”

Rimany compares it to hiring a personal trainer. People go to a gym and hook up with a personal trainer. They pay the trainer to come up with a personalized plan and to work with them as the plan progresses. It's the same with a health coach, Rimany says. “People don't hesitate to pay a personal trainer if they think it will benefit them. A personal trainer doesn't just give you that service.”

Over the past couple of years, Rimany has focused on making his business model as simple as possible. “We have to clarify the message,” he says. “People don't know what we can do. We have to tell them. We have to tell our story. I was thinking of a mission statement recently, and I realized that we're ON a mission, and that's the mission. There's more to life than prescription drugs.”



THE CHARLOTTE EXPERIENCE I RECOMMEND

“Get out and explore! There's so much to do. Take a day trip to the Whitewater Park. Ride the Fury at Carowinds. Take a brewery tour – just chill and sample some brews. Go to a museum in Uptown. Rent a bike or a scooter and go!”

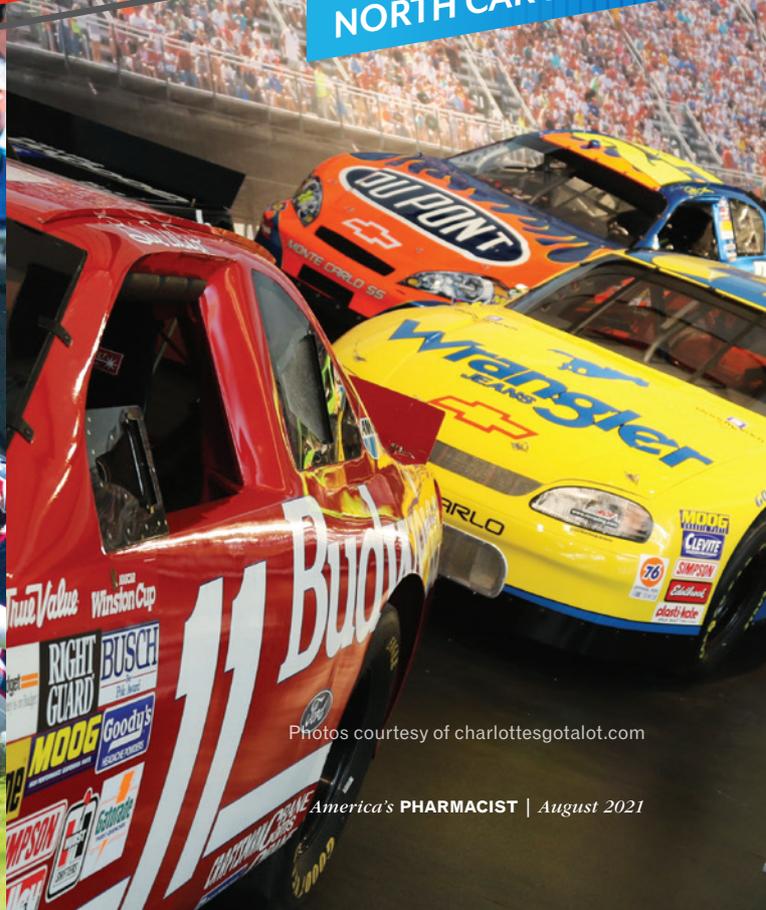
– Josh Rimany



GET TO KNOW THIS YEAR'S CONVENTION CITY

CHARLOTTE

NORTH CAROLINA



Photos courtesy of charlottesgotalot.com

members used to traveling to major “destination” cities like Orlando, San Diego, New Orleans, and Boston may have looked at this year’s NCPA Annual Convention location and said, “Charlotte? Why Charlotte?”

Well, why not?

Over the past couple of decades, Charlotte has emerged as one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. In 2020, the city pushed past San Francisco as the nation’s 15th largest city. Ask 10 Charlotteans (that’s what Charlotte residents are called. They are NOT Charlatans.) what’s behind such explosive growth, and you’ll get 10 completely different answers, among them: strong economy, major airport hub, national banking center, robust health care system, mild climate, a plethora of parks and outdoor activities, major sports franchises, world-class restaurants and retail, a light-rail system, plenty of museums and cultural activities, fun and funky neighborhoods. Oh, and craft breweries – 69 of ‘em and counting.

Here are a few things to know before you head to the Queen City in October:

- The convention will be held in Uptown Charlotte. In Charlotte, downtown is officially called Uptown. Why? The city council made it official in 1974, but it started years earlier when folks discovered that central Charlotte does sit at a higher elevation than the rest of the city. So, when you go there, you’re going “up to town.”
- The convention will be held a few blocks from the intersection of Trade and Tryon streets, which is called Independence Square. In the 1700s, two vital pathways crossed there. One

was the Great Wagon Road which once stretched from Philadelphia to Georgia, and the other was a large Native American trail.

- Charlotte was incorporated in 1768 as Charlotte Town, a tribute to King George III’s wife, Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. That’s why Charlotte is known as the Queen City – and why Charlotte is in Mecklenburg County.
- Charlotte has another nickname – the Hornet’s Nest, and the NBA team is the Charlotte Hornets. Here’s why: In 1780, British General Charles Cornwallis marched his men through the city, where they encountered firm resistance. He’d go on to call Charlotte “a hornet’s nest of rebellion.” The name stuck.
- Make sure to get a photo made in front of the Firebird sculpture, or as it’s also known by locals, the Disco Chicken. It’s on Tryon Street, just outside the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art. The 17-foot avian is adorned with more than 7,500 pieces of colored glass.
- Johnson & Wales University, regarded as one of the top culinary institutions, opened a Charlotte branch in 2004. It was a game-changer for the Charlotte restaurant scene. The city now has more than its share of world-class restaurants and just about any cuisine you can imagine. You’ll also find plenty of local favorites such as barbecue, fried chicken, collard greens, hush puppies, and biscuits. You’ll find that just about anything you want to eat is a short walk and quick light-rail ride from your hotel.
- Speaking of the light-rail, Charlotte’s system is called the Lynx Blue Line. You can take it right to the convention center.

If you want to explore the city a little, there’s plenty to discover using the light-rail.

- You’re in auto-racing country in Charlotte, and NASCAR is king. Uptown, you’ll find the organization’s 150,000-square-foot Hall of Fame. Just outside of town, you’ll find the famed Charlotte Motor Speedway, home of the Coca-Cola 600, the Bank of America 500, and the NASCAR Sprint All-Star Race. About 75 percent of all NASCAR teams have their home base within two hours of Charlotte.
- Evangelist Billy Graham grew up in Charlotte. A major thoroughfare in town, Billy Graham Parkway, bears his name. His library and museum are on Billy Graham Parkway.
- In 1836, the Charlotte Mint opened to produce gold coins, and it did so until it closed in 1861. There is a Mint Museum in Charlotte, but it’s not a museum about coins. There’s a Mint Street, too.
- The U.S National Whitewater Center is located on the outskirts of Charlotte and is home to the world’s largest man-made whitewater river. The river’s powerful pumps can unleash enough water to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool in eight seconds.
- The 2012 Democratic National Convention was held in Charlotte. The 2020 Republican National Convention was to be held in Charlotte, but most convention activities, except for a few committee meetings, were canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

SEE YOU IN CHARLOTTE!

OCTOBER 9-12, 2021