

ON THE ROAD TO PROSPERITY

A visit to four pharmacies combining clinical care and enhanced bottom lines

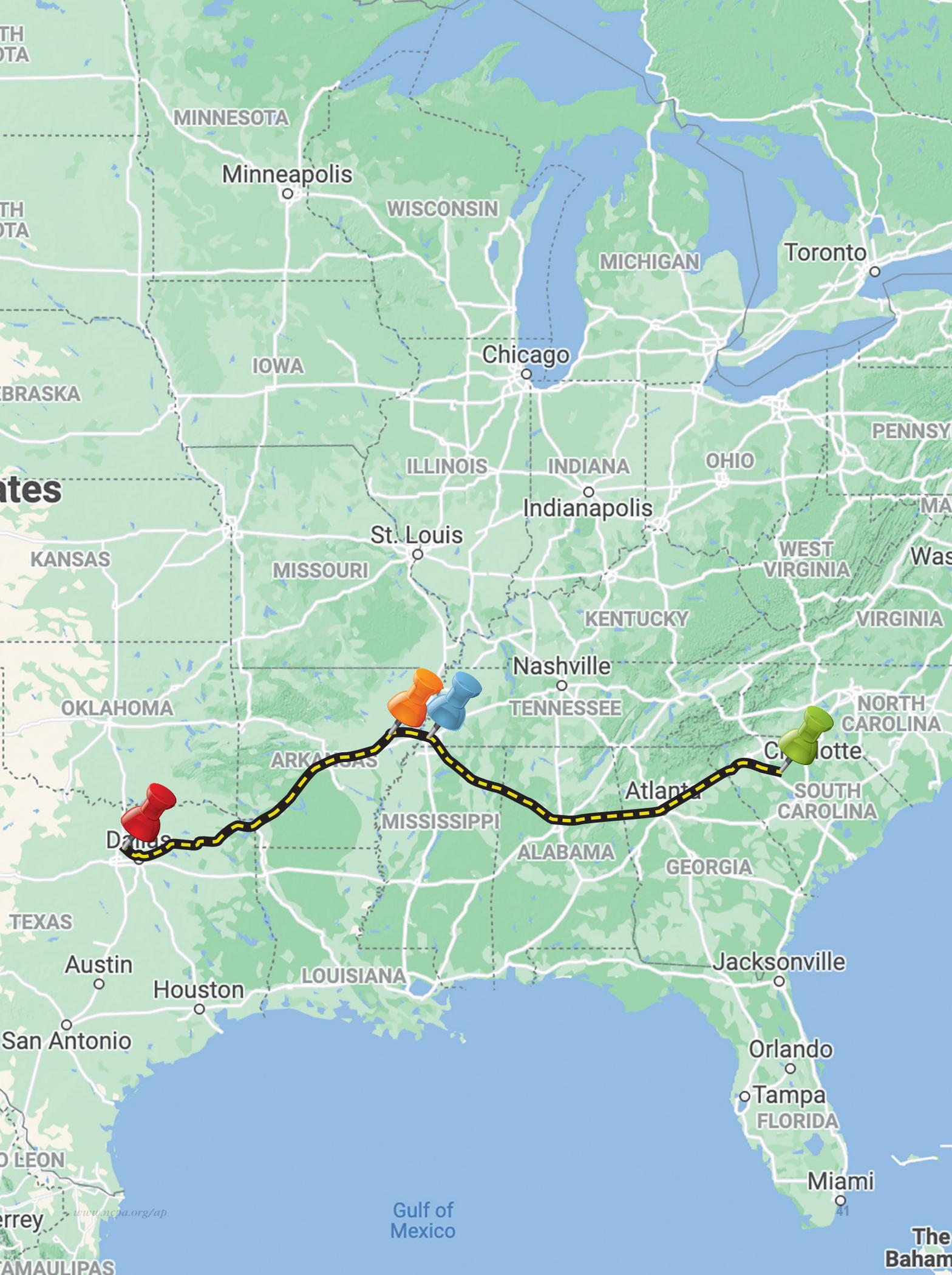
by Bruce Kneeland

Those who know me are aware of my affinity for getting on the road and visiting the many and varied independent pharmacies throughout the country. Many of those road trips have been chronicled in these pages over the years.

Late last year I was interested in visiting pharmacies performing some clinical or operational services that are helping them grow. With the help of Liberty Software* we identified four such pharmacies. On Oct. 4, I took off from the Liberty offices in the Dallas/Fort Worth area and drove to each pharmacy. My goal was to see firsthand how these pharmacies were able to adopt new practices that are helping them succeed.

In selecting the pharmacies, we did our best to represent a cross-section of types. One is in a major metropolitan area with 25 competitors within a five-mile radius. Another is a 15,000 square-foot pharmacy in a small rural town. The third is a brand new 1,800 square-foot pharmacy in a suburban community. The fourth is a well-established pharmacy in a small town where the grandson of the founder has decided to work in the family business and bring in some new ideas.





MINNESOTA

Minneapolis

WISCONSIN

MICHIGAN

Toronto

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ILLINOIS

INDIANA

OHIO

PENNSY

ates

KANSAS

MISSOURI

St. Louis

Indianapolis

WEST VIRGINIA

MA

Was

KENTUCKY

VIRGINIA

Nashville

TENNESSEE

NORTH CAROLINA

OKLAHOMA

ARKANSAS

MISSISSIPPI

Atlanta

Charlotte

SOUTH CAROLINA

TEXAS

Austin

Houston

LOUISIANA

ALABAMA

GEORGIA

Jacksonville

San Antonio

Orlando

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Miami

Gulf of Mexico

The Baham

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**FLOWER MOUND PHARMACY
FLOWER MOUND, TEXAS**

Dennis Song, RPh, has built a remarkable business counseling patients on vitamins and nutritional supplements. He also fills a lot of prescriptions and has a vibrant compounding practice, along with a well-stocked and artfully merchandised front-end.

Song says that prior to opening his pharmacy he worked for a Dallas area grocery chain, but says, “Practicing pharmacy in that environment was not where I wanted my career to go.” So, 24 years ago he opened his pharmacy so that he could focus more on patient care.

One of the first things he did was provide nutrition classes for people with diabetes. To make the classes more effective, and appealing, he arranged to take participants on a food

tour of the same grocery store where he’d worked previously. And, in a move that impresses me, he worked with his former employer to provide each participant with a \$20 gift card so they could buy diabetes-friendly foods during the tour.

Building on food classes, Song made the leap into fee-based private consultations. One way he builds awareness of the service, and acceptance for his fee, is by making public presentations. Indeed, shortly after my visit Song was a featured presenter for a continuing education session on supplements at the NCPA 2021 Annual Convention in Charlotte, N.C., speaking in a packed conference room.

Song understands that many pharmacists are just not comfortable making recommendations for high-quality vitamins and supplements with the price tag they often carry. To succeed he suggests four things.

First, do your homework. You need to have a thorough grasp of the need for, and benefits of, appropriate supplementation. Second, find suppliers that you trust. There are a number of companies that specialize in professional-grade nutritional supplements. Song suggests talking with other owners to find a line they recommend. He and several other like-minded pharmacy owners are working closely with an emerging company, Medella Springs, to manufacture a number of clinically tested, pharmaceutical-grade products.

Dennis Song offers a wide variety of patient services at Flower Mound Pharmacy, including nutrition classes for people with diabetes and private consultations. He emphasizes providing a professional and attractive health care setting.

Third, Song says, have a variety of items artfully displayed. Finally, be professional. Make the pharmacy look like a health care facility. Have attractive exterior signage coupled with point-of-purchase materials that emphasize that idea that you are a professional. That includes a private consultation area.

**CALDWELL DRUG
WYNNE, ARK.**

Caldwell Drug is amazing, as is its owner, Max Caldwell, RPh. The store is 15,000 square feet and features a three-lane drive-up window that supports this high-volume pharmacy. Caldwell says one of the ways he and his team are able to fill a large number of prescriptions and still provide personalized attention is by using medication synchronization.

Caldwell is an active member of the Arkansas Pharmacists Association and says that in 2013 the state served as a pilot for med sync under the guidance of NCPA and with the support of PrescribeWellness. He decided he wanted to participate. When Caldwell came back and told his staff about the idea, he says they responded with something like, “We don’t think that is going to work.”

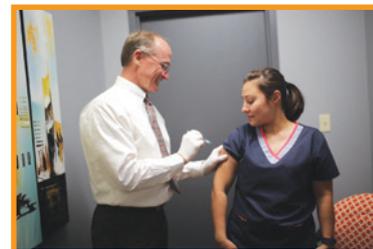
But he challenged them to try it. “We agreed to approach 20 patients,” Caldwell says. “The response was positive, so we went ahead with it.”

To kick off the program, Caldwell implemented a bonus system for any team member who explained the program and enrolled a patient. In a few months the program grew to 500 people. Today, he says the pharmacy has more than 1,000 patients enrolled.

Caldwell says the benefits are many. First, he says refills “skyrocketed.”



The phone rings less often, which improves the work environment. He decided on a 28-day refill cycle which allows him to separate his patients into four segments. A team member calls each patient about a week before their refill date to check on any changes. Caldwell says only about 10 percent of the patients have any changes. The program fits perfectly with his Redi-Med pouch packaging service. Having more people on med sync reduces the number of deliveries they need to make, resulting in significant savings.



A highly efficient and effective medication synchronization program has become a hallmark at Caldwell Drug. The pharmacy also offers a number of clinical classes and has a community room which can be used free of charge for private gatherings.



When designing his new 15,000 square-foot building a few years ago, Caldwell decided to put in class space with an adjacent kitchen. This is where diabetes classes are held, with the kitchen making it possible to teach healthy cooking skills. The room now also serves as a community room which can be used — free of charge — for private gatherings. As it is at the back of the store, Caldwell says it is not unusual for people walking through the well-merchandized front end to make a purchase.

“I decided to open my own pharmacy where I had the freedom to provide the kind of care I believed people deserved,” he says. The result is a brand new, built-from-scratch pharmacy in the east Memphis suburb of Bartlett, Tenn.

jumped on that as best he could while still trying to get his new pharmacy operational. Initially when the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines came out they required super cold storage. Hadley says he could not justify the expense so he started with just the J&J product. Now that extreme cold temperature requirements are no longer necessary, he provides all three.

The 1,800 square-foot store opened in June 2020. It is located on a major business street near several physicians' offices and has great curb appeal with a nice exterior digital sign. Hadley offers delivery, has a drive-up window, and carries an attractive selection of OTC and other health care products. He even built a patient waiting area off to the side of the pharmacy counter with a small gift section.

But to focus only on COVID-19 would overlook the original plan. Hadley provides a full range of immunizations including, flu, shingles, pneumonia, and HPV. As a new pharmacy

**KIRBY WHITTEN DRUG
BARTLETT, TENN.**

Stephen Hadley, PharmD, has a variety of professional experience. He has held clinical pharmacy positions in health system pharmacies as well as with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and served as a faculty member for a pharmacy school. Prior to opening his own pharmacy, he worked in an independent pharmacy that was part of a franchise program and then tried working for two national chains.

In each role Hadley missed having the ability to interact with patients in a meaningful manner, as management's goals did not align with his.

Hadley also sets his focus on building a robust immunization program. With the pharmacy opening in the summer of 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic provided him with an opportunity to make a difference. Hadley



When working for others proved unfulfilling, Stephen Hadley decided to open his own pharmacy to provide the kind of patient care he thought people deserved.



he is still establishing relationships with local physicians and says he appreciates that his wholesaler, Cardinal Health, had a program that provided him with the collaborative practice agreement he needed to get started.



**ROCHE PHARMACY
WHITMIRE, S.C.**

Visiting Roche Pharmacy was a pleasure. Blake Roche, PharmD, has a warm and welcoming personality and loves to go out front and talk with patients. He is the grandson of the founder, John Roche, who opened the pharmacy in 1966. It is now owned by Blake Roche's father. It is a freestanding building of about 4,000 square feet and sits across from the post office on the main street of this quaint town.

Roche is a fairly young man, licensed in 2019. He says that as part of his rotations he became involved in doing immunizations and decided that service would be good for the community and the family pharmacy. To help with those goals, Roche is planning to make improvements in the store layout and open up a private consultation room. So far Roche says he is off to a good start. More immunizations and point-of-care testing are on the short list as he continues to expand.

Whitmire's population is about 2,000, with Roche Pharmacy being the only pharmacy in the town, located almost equidistant between Columbia and Greenville, S.C. In serving the community the store stocks a variety of traditional OTC, products, health and beauty supplies, home office, gifts, and home medical equipment. But the star of the front end, and a major anchor to the community, is the old-fashioned soda fountain.

Blake Roche is adding some new school touches to complement the traditional services at Roche Pharmacy, opened by his grandfather in 1966.

One new feature is a service that is fully supported by the store's Liberty Software and allows for front-end items to show up automatically on the pharmacy's web site as they are scanned-in from their McKesson order. The items are featured, complete with pictures and product description and with the items' retail price extracted from their wholesaler's item file. Roche says that while the number of items sold as a result of the system is not dramatic, he still believes having the system has been a positive for the total image of the pharmacy.

As Roche talks about his plans for the future, he says that he and his father share the same vision for the business: "We want to move forward but we also want to maintain the personal service reputation of the pharmacy."

DIFFERENT WITH COMMON GOALS

So, there you have it. Four pharmacies, all doing something different yet all still with the same goal of helping people live healthier lives while generating enough income to support the business. In reviewing my notes and reflecting on the trip, three things stand out as critical to the success of any pharmacy. First, be willing to try new things. Second, when trying new things, understand the first people you need to sell on the new project are your team



members. Without their support, new initiatives are not likely to go well. Third, do your homework, and make sure you have the skills, tools, and passion for the project and that the new program or service meets a genuine need in your community. ■

Bruce Kneeland is a longtime friend of community pharmacy, industry consultant, and contributor to *America's Pharmacist*®. He currently hosts a podcast show which can be heard at www.pharmacycrossroads.com, and he can be reached at BFKneeland@gmail.com.

*A special thanks to Liberty Software for making this road trip possible. Liberty Software is a pharmacy management platform for retail pharmacies. Visit www.libertysoftware.com or call 800-430-9603 for more information.