



## Medicine Center celebrates 45 years in business and a decade on the radio.

by Chris Linville



In 2011, father and son pharmacists Paul and Brad White debuted a weekly radio show, called *Health Matters*, featuring a wide variety of experts discussing and educating the public on health care issues and at the same time promoting their business, Medicine Center Pharmacy in Canton, Ohio.

A decade and some 500 shows later, *Health Matters* is still going strong, even in the face of a pandemic and a changing media landscape. (Visit [www.medshoprx.com/blog-health-matters](http://www.medshoprx.com/blog-health-matters) for a sampling.)

"I remember when the radio station (WHBC 1480 AM) approached us. They asked us for either a one-month or three-month commitment in the very beginning, and we felt so

green that we thought we would be lucky to make it to the end of that initial commitment," says Nancy Wharmby, Medicine Center executive vice president. "We've really developed some wonderful relationships from that radio show that have affected our store in very positive ways. We had a group of Ohio head and neck surgeons who came into our stores and did allergy screenings after they were guests on the radio show. There have been some nice success stories like that of connections and relationships that would never had been generated without that radio show."

The show's 10-year anniversary coincides with Medicine Center's 45th anniversary. Paul White and his wife Susan White opened their first store as a Medicine Shoppe

Pharmacy franchise in 1976 in Canton. Eventually the Whites opted out of the franchise to grow the retail side of the business and established the Medicine Center Pharmacy. The business currently has four retail pharmacies and a long-term care pharmacy.

"There have been a lot of changes not only to the pharmacy industry but to each of our communities as well," Paul White says. "Our customers come first, and as their needs have grown, we have adapted alongside them. Many of our customers have been with us through generations. We know our customers, and they know us."

Brad White jokes that he has been with the pharmacy "since birth" as he worked there in high school

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AIR



*Gabe Traban (far left), NCPA's senior director of store operations and marketing, made an appearance on Health Matters in January 2012. He was joined by (from left), Noman Rafique, MD, and Brad and Paul White.*

and college. He joined the family business as a pharmacist in 1996 after graduating from the Purdue University College of Pharmacy.

### **ADJUSTING TO THE PANDEMIC**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the show was done at the WHBC studios every Friday from 9-10 a.m. Since then it has been done remotely, and show content is now shared via a variety of social media platforms.

"My father has always been very passionate about this program. He really enjoys talking to the providers and the leaders, so we transitioned to hosting the show ourselves through Zoom," White says. "Then the station would call in and provide a live feed to them. We were on Zoom live, on Facebook Live, and on the radio station live all at the same time."

White says he and his father have done some pre-recorded Zoom interviews, which provides flexibility if providers aren't available for live shows on Friday mornings. He referenced a recent program that

was pre-recorded with a provider on hormone replacement therapy.

"It was actually a nice experiment because we were able to have an hour-long discussion instead of a 42-minute discussion and we got a lot more done," he says. "We are exploring doing a pre-recorded versus a live option to get more providers engaged on their schedule as opposed to our schedule."

### **SHOW SUPPORT**

Wharmby says a local hospital in the county is one of the primary sponsors of the show. It usually provides two guests per month, often aligning with whatever health condition is featured, such as breast cancer awareness or heart health month. Wharmby says the hospital will typically send a specialist related to information it wants to get out into the public at a particular time. For stroke awareness month, the hospital's stroke coordinator came on and talked about stroke warning signs. Wharmby says other organizations sponsor the show every month or seasonally, depending on what products or services they are wanting to promote.

"Brad and I also make a list of guests that we are interested in having, often because it's information that we think is important for the public," Wharmby says. "Several times during the pandemic we've had our local health department featured on the show and did questions about the pandemic and how to respond, how to get tested, how to find COVID-19 shots, things like that."

Wharmby also says the show might feature topics that they think will enhance the pharmacy's business.

"We have an accredited compounding lab, so we like to reach out to veterinarians, who frequently rely on

compounding," she says. "Having a vet on the show is a good way to introduce our business to people who might not be aware that we exist. Veterinarians are always popular shows because everybody has a question about their pet."

"Many patients almost take better care of their pets than themselves," Brad White quips. "They won't blink an eye on paying \$100 for a prescription for their dog but not for themselves."

Other examples include guests who talk about patients struggling to be adherent to their medications.

"We'll discuss services we have like our compliance packaging, home delivery, and things of that nature," White says. "So that's always kind of nice to go hand-in-hand. A couple of weeks ago we did a show that was just my father and I giving Top 10 pharmacists tips for healthy living."

### **FIGHTING DISINFORMATION**

Wharmby says that having a platform for providers to discuss health issues in the last decade has been important for educating patients, and it's even more so in this day and age.

"There's such a drive within the communities and within ourselves to have a fast answer and go straight to the internet for whatever our health concern may be," she says. "Physicians and health care professionals realize that, so there's a little bit of an urgency to get accurate information out to the public to sometimes contradict what's going on in the media or what they are reading or assuming. That has been especially true during the pandemic. This show has always been about community service, and to share health-related information with the listening public. It's very important to us."

Wharmby cites the long-term polling that has consistently rated pharmacists highly as among the most trusted and accessible health care professionals.

“That is something that Paul is passionate about, and very proud of,” she says. “To be able to have this format to share information and to highlight the fact that pharmacists are accessible and have that knowledge is really one of our primary goals that we want to convey.”

### LOOKING AHEAD

Brad White says that while the radio show has been enjoyable and rewarding, he knows that terrestrial radio (free, over the air) is being challenged by satellite and other means of communication that tend to attract younger audiences. Traditional radio has been so powerful for so long that the WHBC call letters supposedly stand for We Helped Build Canton.

But even White, who in his late 40s is not a millennial, admits that he often listens to podcasts or an audio book or satellite radio.

“How many people still listen to regular radio?” he says. “Radio has been very good to us, but deep down I kind of know in the future it can’t just be about radio because we have to go other places. I think that’s the most challenging thing for all of us. You can’t just rest on where you came from, you have to look forward to where you are going.”

White knows that demographics will likely guide decisions going forward.

“We’re acutely aware that the average age of our population is mid to high 50s or 60s, and we need to attract younger patients, so we’re trying to leverage different methods of communication across different

media,” he says. “We’re trying to re-evaluate our current format – maybe it needs to be shorter, maybe it needs different types of content, maybe it should be all video. I guess we are like everybody else, trying to reinvent the wheel and be engaging, and we know that while our content works great with some people, with other demographics maybe it doesn’t, so we’re learning a lot monthly about what gets traction and what doesn’t.”

Wharmby says she envisions more emphasis on its podcasts and Facebook Live.

“How people access their information is just changing so rapidly and quickly,” she says. “Our concern and our focus in the short term is making sure we’re still continuing to reach the people that we want to reach, who need to hear our information.”

“It’s definitely a different animal, and I’m not sure it’s our total solution,” White says of podcasts. “I think it’s something else that at least gives us accessibility.”

There’s no doubt that Medicine Center, at 45, is adapting with the times. Brad White says all its stores have been combined into a central fill in one location, leveraging updated automation technology and ideally a better return on investment. He says the business recently consolidated its delivery services to be more efficient and serve more patients in its community.

“We’re fighting the good fight,” White says. “We are trying to micro-manage every single aspect of our business, reducing our expenses and enhancing our profitability in any way we can.” ■

**Chris Linville is managing editor of *America’s Pharmacist*®.**

### Fast Facts: Medicine Center Pharmacy

**Established:**  
1976

**Management:**  
Paul White, owner.  
Co-founded with wife Susan.

**Products and services:**  
Includes standard retail, compounding, concierge services, consultations, easy max blood glucose monitor, free delivery, long-term care, loyalty and rewards, medication simplification, packaging options, refills, vaccination, screening, clinic appointments, and weekly radio show, podcasts, Facebook Live events and webinars

**NCPA member since:**  
2007



*Pictured from left are Nancy Wharmby, Medicine Center executive vice president; Joy Parkinson (daughter of Paul and Susan White, sister of Brad White); Paul White; Susan White; and Brad White.*