Pete Crouch, pharmacist and owner of Eden Drug Pharmacy in Eden, N.C., says one of the goals for his business was to determine “what would our vision be?”

He basically settled on three key areas: keeping their patients healthy, giving back to the community, and helping the community thrive.

Another part of that vision, Crouch says, is for patients to have a world-class experience.

“When they come into the pharmacy, they are going to notice a difference,” he says. “We do the same thing that the big boxes do, we put pills in a bottle. And you can get the same pills at our store that you get at a big-box store. So what’s the difference? What are things that bring patients back to us time and time again? It’s how we take care of our patients, how we solve their problems, and how we make them feel.”

A global pandemic obviously brings that focus on patient care into a sharper focus. As with most independent pharmacies, Eden Drug has taken steps to protect staff and patients while still providing critical services. The pharmacy is open for regular hours, but it is using its drive-thru, curbside and of course, delivery to receive medications.

All photos by Lynn Hoy

Pete Crouch and wife Debbie purchased Eden Drug Pharmacy in 2006.
“We never charge for delivery,” Crouch says. “It’s funny to see some of the big boxes offering free delivery now, and making a big deal of it, just like when they took tobacco out of the pharmacy – independents have been doing this forever. It’s just the right thing to do.

“That’s one thing independents probably don’t do a good job of, tooting our own horn.”

Eden, a town of about 15,000 residents, is located in the north–central part of North Carolina, near the Virginia state line. Eden Drug was started in 1982 by a group of partners, and Crouch, a 1976 University of North Carolina pharmacy school graduate, joined the pharmacy in 2000. In 2006 he and his wife Debbie purchased the store.

“We’ve tried to build on the shoulders of what those other pharmacists created,” Crouch says.

Eden Drug has close to 40 employees in its single location, with four pharmacists. The pharmacy offers a full menu of services, including free delivery; prescription counseling; vaccinations (flu, pneumonia, shingles, whooping cough, tetanus, and travel vaccines); free monthly wellness education classes on diabetes nutrition, diabetes wellness and heart health; compounding, including flavoring, veterinary, and custom compounding for dermatology and pain management; insurance consultations and a variety of refill options.

Providing services again falls into Eden Drug’s vision.

It’s a culture of caring, empathy, concern, and professionalism,” Crouch says. “We are here to help them solve their problems and take care of them in a way that they won’t at other places.”

GETTING IN SYNC

A majority of independent pharmacies offer some sort of medication synchronization program (some 79 percent according to the 2019 NCPA Digest sponsored by Cardinal Health) and Eden Drug is no exception with about 2,000 patients in its program. It also does advanced compliance packaging for about 200 patients.

Of the latter group, Crouch says, “We have learned that the people who need this the most are the ones who can least afford it. We provide Pete Crouch’s daughter Amanda Crouch Perfetti joined her dad at the pharmacy in 2014, and is dedicated to her father’s vision.
the service to patients at no charge. We don’t do it for everyone, but for those who just can’t seem to manage their meds, and have adherence issues. It helps to solve those problems and get them back on track.”

Crouch says that a healthy sync program can also help keep track of what medications are taking up space.

Crouch says that having classes fits into Eden Drug’s vision of commitment to its community. Its diabetes programs are accredited by the American Association of Diabetes Educators, so it is able to bill for some of those services.

“Crouch says that a healthy sync program can also help keep track of what medications are taking up space.
attack cancer. Crouch says Eden Drug has raised about $80,000 for it in the last six years. The pharmacy also supports other organizations such as the Lord’s Pantry, the American Red Cross, and local hospice services.

“We want to have an impact on things we care deeply about and help our community,” Crouch says.

PHARMACY’S FUTURE
Like other independents, Crouch feels the pressures regarding issues such as reimbursements, costs of goods, DIR fees, and PBM tactics, and he knows the days of prescriptions sustaining a pharmacy are long gone.

“We need to have the prescriptions because that brings patients into our pharmacy,” he says. “But we have to figure out how to do things better.”

Crouch says one area where independents can help themselves is by keeping a laser-sharp focus on their business fundamentals.

“Budgeting is huge, along with staying on top of your financials every day,” he says. “We need to get really good at knowing what our payroll should be. If sales go down or reimbursement goes down, we’ve got to be able to manage our expenses. Otherwise cash flow will get to be a real issue. You have to have cash so you can take advantage of opportunities that come along.”

Still, independent pharmacy has been resilient, and despite the obstacles, Crouch understands what pharmacies like Eden Drug mean to their communities.

“We have to remember why we got into pharmacy in the first place — it’s to take care of patients,” he says. “We have to make sure that they are the center of what we do. We still have to watch expenses, do a budget, and do all the little things just right to make all of this work. A lot of times things will fall into place if we do that.”

Chris Linville is America’s Pharmacist® managing editor.

Fast Facts: Eden Drug Pharmacy

Established: 1982
Management: Pete Crouch, RPh, and wife Debbie, owners
Products & Services: Retail prescriptions; free delivery; prescription counseling; vaccinations, free monthly wellness education classes (diabetes nutrition, diabetes wellness and heart health); compounding (including flavoring, veterinary, and custom compounding for dermatology and pain management); insurance consultations; and a variety of refill options.
Professional: Past member of the board of trustees at the former Morehead Memorial Hospital, now known as UNC Rockingham Health Care. Served on the executive board of the Eden Chamber of Commerce. Past president of the Rockingham County Society of Pharmacists. Also served as a pharmacist consultant for Hospice of Rockingham County for 15 years.
Education: B.S. in pharmacy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1976.

The pharmacist team at Eden Drug:
Pete Crouch, Amanda Crouch Perfetti, J. Frank Burton and Chad York.