

# A MID-AMERICAN ROADSHOW *Part II*

Six flourishing pharmacies  
in the heartland

**Editor's Note:** Kneeland will be conducting a "Guerilla Marketing" continuing education program at the NCPA 2016 Convention Monday, Oct. 17, at 4:15 p.m. in New Orleans. The session will provide more details on some of the marketing programs these road trip pharmacies use.



by Bruce Kneeland

photography by Bruce Kneeland

One of the secrets of success is to learn from and build on the success of others. In today's pharmacy world, as one deals with rejected third party claims or the distress of losing a patient to a competitor, it is easy to get discouraged. One way to overcome that disappointment and renew your commitment to exceptional patient care is to learn about your peers who are succeeding in these tough times. But where are these successful pharmacies, you say? And, what are they doing?

To answer that question, and under the sponsorship of the Independent Pharmacy Cooperative (IPC), I set out on a road trip to visit a dozen pharmacies in mid-America, that broad expanse of flatlands between the Appalachian and Rocky mountains. My wife Donna and I drove 5,671 miles and visited 12 carefully pre-selected pharmacies in 10 states: Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.

It was a wonderful learning experience. What follows is the second of a two-part article that summarizes a number of things the next six pharmacies are doing. The first six were featured in the September *America's Pharmacist*, so we are halfway through the trip. Next stop, Salem, Ill.

**BANDY PHARMACY** ([www.stores.healthmart.com/bandyspharmacy/stores.aspx](http://www.stores.healthmart.com/bandyspharmacy/stores.aspx)) in Salem is the flagship pharmacy for a combination of stores owned by Eric Bandy, RPh. Bandy has two pharmacies, a telepharmacy, and two medical equipment stores. His Salem location is large, coming in at about 8,000 square feet, and showcasing a large assortment of medical equipment. Bandy also stocks scrubs, which he says brings in a lot of nurses and other health care workers, generating a "halo" effect on his practice.

Bandy's is BIG into compounding. One tool he uses to support this service is the ZRT Saliva Test kits. When appropriate, the professional staff at Bandy's will recommend the lab test. The kits sell between \$100 and \$400, depending on the number of labs requested. Bandy says patients are impressed by the lab test's capability to pinpoint precise chemical deficiencies. And, he adds, taking lab results into a physician is a great way to assure that what the doctor prescribes will have the maximum benefit to his patients.

One of the truly remarkable success stories Bandy shares is his involvement with a local health insurance agent. The agent has worked with a few small employers and put them on a high deductible health plan where they carve



out the prescription benefit. Employees then take their prescriptions to Bandy's. He charges a normal co-pay and then submits a bill to the employer for the remaining medication costs.

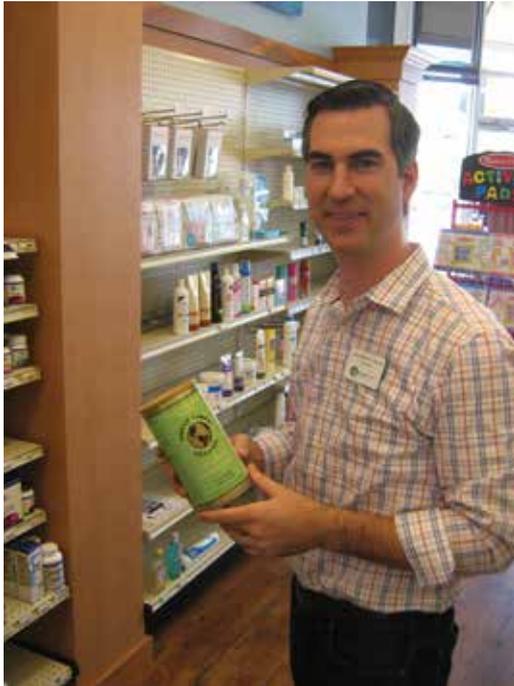
Bandy says this process has proven effective in saving the employer and employees money by taking the PBM completely out of the equation. This process is currently being used by four small businesses with a combined enrollment of just over 100 people.

Bandy is involved in the Illinois State Pharmacy Association, serving as this year's president. One of the projects the association is working on is legislation that would rein

***Bandy Pharmacy owner Eric Bandy (top left, with Bruce Kneeland) has two pharmacies, a telepharmacy, and two medical equipment stores to serve customer needs.***

in PBM abuses in the area of audits, price updates, and negative reimbursements.

Bandy says, "I wish more pharmacists understood that it is the state associations that do the most to protect and enhance the profession." He adds that pharmacists in all practice settings would benefit from joining and becoming actively involved in their state association.



Visiting **GREENTREE PHARMACY** ([www.stores.healthmart.com/greentreepharmacy/stores.aspx](http://www.stores.healthmart.com/greentreepharmacy/stores.aspx)) in Kirkwood, Mo., was a double delight. Not only did I find Tony Roberts, PharmD, and his staff to be pleasant and professional, but I got to see this pharmacy located right on historic Route 66, which brought back fond memories of the “Route 66 Pharmacy Road Trip” my wife and I took in 2012 and reported on in the July and August 2012 issue of *America's Pharmacist*.

Roberts bought the pharmacy in September 2015 and is repositioning it to be THE professional pharmacy in the area. He gets out into the community and makes contact with physicians and other referral sources. And when he calls on them, he has a variety of special services he can talk about, including Green Pack, a compliance packaging system supported by his Parata Pass unit; a robust compounding lab, the Simplify My Meds® med sync program, a medication therapy management program, flu shots, medication flavoring, and an interesting initiative called Surgery Scripts. This is a service he offers to an outpatient surgical center nearby. The program ensures—using his delivery service—that patients get medications they need both prior to and after their procedure.

Roberts promotes functional medicine saying, “Good health really needs to start on the inside.” He supports that part of his practice with a variety of high quality supplements and protein shakes and bars that appeal to the residents of this upwardly mobile community. In talking about that part of his practice, he showed me how he counsels people about replacing their proton pump inhibitors with a quality probiotic.

***Tony Roberts, owner of Greentree Pharmacy in Kirkwood, Mo., displays some of his probiotic offerings, which have become a focal point for the business.***

With the pharmacy also being on Route 66, it attracts a number of tourists. Greentree's front end is small but artfully laid out, and provides visitors with a nice selection of cards, Melissa and Doug toys, candy, and traditional OTC products.

One of the simplest yet impressive things Greentree has is a well-designed customer referral program. In each of his counseling cubicles, Roberts has a sign promoting the service, along with a stack of take-one cards that a current patient can fill out and give to a friend. When redeemed, both receive a \$10 gift certificate.

Roberts says he has tasked his wife to help build the practice by maintaining his Facebook page. He says her posts and interactions with people on social media have had a positive impact on his sales and bring him new customers on a weekly basis. You really ought to “like” Greentree Pharmacy Kirkwood. You'll be impressed.

Partners Randy McDonough, PharmD, and Michael Deninger, PhD, can truly be labeled the dynamic duo. Coming from careers in academia, these two friends decided the time had come to practice what they preached. So, they bought a traditional community pharmacy in Iowa City, Iowa, and started the process of turning it into a model for pharmacy's future.



*For owners Michael Deninger (top left) and Randy McDonough, one of Towncrest Pharmacy's primary objectives is to "find and resolve medication issues."*

And if profitability, well cared for patients, and a satisfied work force are indicators of success, it is apparent they have succeeded admirably. **TOWNCREST PHARMACY** ([www.stores.healthmart.com/towncrestpharmacy/stores.aspx](http://www.stores.healthmart.com/towncrestpharmacy/stores.aspx)) has a great location on a main street in this bustling town of 75,000 in central Iowa. Indeed, the location is so attractive that while standing in their parking lot I could see a CVS, Walgreens, and a HyVee supermarket nearby.

To reap benefits in this location, McDonough and Deninger needed to do some remarkable things. So, they worked with the health department to get certified to participate in a long-acting anti-psychotic medication program. And they have built a robust vaccination program and provide flu, shingles, pneumonia, and TDAP immunizations.

McDonough was an early advocate for medication synchronization and started providing that service shortly after buying the pharmacy. At that time, he tracked all of the details on a paper-based system. As that program grew, he adopted the PrescribeWellness program and now has more than 500 patients enrolled.

Towncrest also does compliance packaging using a pouch system supported by a Parata Pass unit. The pharmacy charges \$8 monthly for the service. McDonough says one of the things pharmacy owners need to learn is to “stop giving away all of their services for free.”

To free up time for patient care, McDonough and Deninger have invested in a robot and pill counting machine, but they have also invested in a pharmacist-heavy staff. McDonough says this is because they believe a community pharmacy’s role is to “find and resolve medication issues.”

One amazing aspect of their practice is the detail that goes into documenting patient encounters and suggesting changes in drug therapy to local physicians. As part of their practice they counsel patients, record their finding in a formal S.O.A.P. note format, and fax the report along with suggested changes in therapy to the patient’s physicians. One key to success, according to McDonough, is organizing the change request in a simple yes/no format so all the physician needs to do is circle the response and fax it back to the pharmacy.

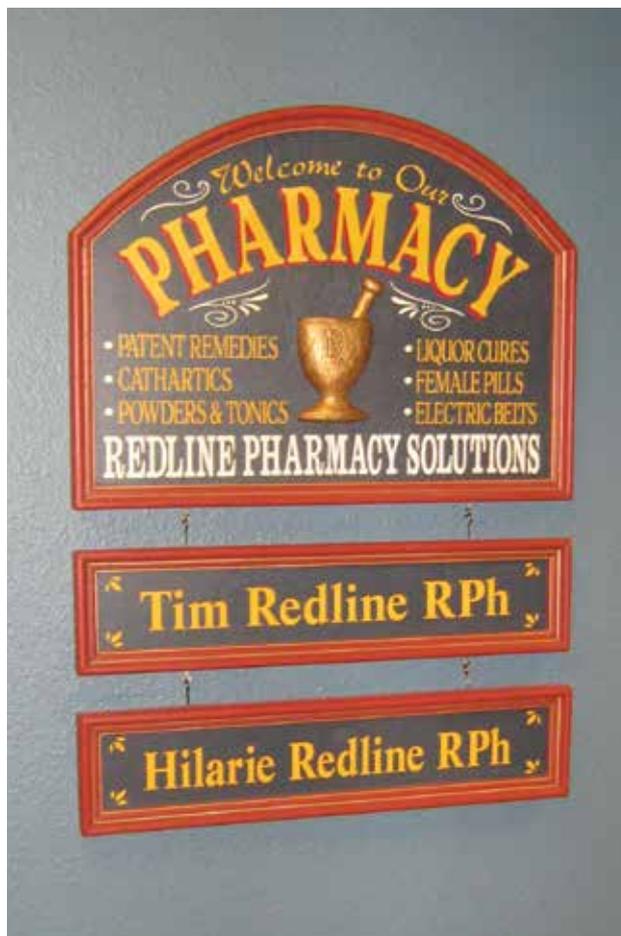
Tim and Hilarie Redline started **REDLINE PHARMACY** ([www.redlinepharmacy.com](http://www.redlinepharmacy.com)) in Hastings, Neb., from scratch in 2003. Today this clinically oriented pharmacy is well established and provides a number of enhanced care services to the 25,000 people living in this town and surrounding area, where Kool-Aid was invented in 1927.

From the start, the Redlines knew they wanted to focus on compounding, so they joined PCCA and took its training program even before they opened the pharmacy. They carefully implemented the things they learned and today have a robust and successful traditional and sterile compounding practice which is supported by the PK compounding system.

Shortly after opening they learned about a home infusion program supported by the Vital Care franchise program.

### The Iowa Pharmacy Association

While traveling through Iowa it was my privilege to stop in and visit with Anthony Pudlo, vice president of professional affairs for the Iowa Pharmacy Association. Kate Gainer, executive vice president and CEO, was unavailable as she was in Washington, D.C., participating the NCPA Congressional Pharmacy Summit. I am impressed by the work the Iowa association is doing. It has taken the lead over the years in passing legislation to enhance pharmacist/physician collaborative practice agreements and immunization services. Currently, it is involved in organizing a telepharmacy pilot project. And, one fun thing it does is support a team of pharmacists to participate in RAGBRAI—the Register’s Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa—the Register being shorthand for the *Des Moines Register*, the state’s largest newspaper. The association puts together a team of cyclists that provide first aid and other support to riders, and it also hosts riders at participating pharmacies along the route with water and information on the important role pharmacists play in helping consumers obtain the maximum benefit from their medications. This is no small ride, with this year’s event attracting more than 8,000 cyclists, most of whom ride nearly 500 miles across the entire state.





*Tim and Hilarie Redline have made compounding, along with nutrition, diet, and lifestyle changes, the primary focus for Redline Pharmacy in Hastings, Neb.*





## Roadside Attractions

One great American road stop staple is the truck stop—and in Walcott, Iowa, right on I-80 just west of the Iowa-Illinois border is the world's largest truck stop. Sitting on 220 acres—four times larger than the average truck stop—is an amazing operation with room to park 900 trucks and cars. The location has a typical truck stop type diner as well as a food court. The primary shopping area boasts a full-size semi-truck inside. And, if you care to, you can buy an Iowa I-80 truck stop t-shirt or any of a thousand other souvenirs they have to offer.

Cawker City is in the center of Kansas near the border of Nebraska and it claims to be the home of the world's largest ball of twine. The story began in 1953, when a local farmer found it tidy and efficient to roll spare bits of twine into a small ball in his barn. But over the years, instead of re-using it like other area farmers, he kept on adding more twine. By 1957, his twine ball weighed 2.5 tons and stood 8 feet tall. By 1961, when he turned it over to the town, it had more than 1.6 million feet of twine rolled into a sphere 11 feet in diameter. Today the giant ball is housed in a nice facility and is the pride and joy of this quaint town as it attracts thousands of visitors every year.

This service has also been well accepted and today accounts for about 60 percent of their sales. The Redlines say the backbone of home IV is antibiotic therapy, but a growing part is providing immune globulin therapy. Among the things they say they like about the Vital Care program is the support they get on marketing, billing, and in gaining access to contracts for products and supplies necessary to care for patients in their homes.

As a clinically oriented pharmacy, walk-in patients are rare. The pharmacy is located in an upscale commercial complex not far off the town's main street. The Redlines decorated and arranged it to support a clinical atmosphere that reflects their practice goals.

Then, rounding out their three-legged stool strategy for success, they have added a professional nutrition, diet, and lifestyle improvement program. Tim Redline says that while contemplating how they could best help people improve their health, he realized that "a large percentage of the top 20 medications are for conditions that are more effectively treated with lifestyle changes." Thus they implemented the Ideal Protein weight loss method and now have a full and part-time health coach overseeing the program.

The program includes a meaningful enrollment fee, an extensive pre-program health assessment, an orientation and goal setting process, and a four-phase treatment program. Each phase addresses a specific aspect of weight loss and, as one moves from one phase to another, aspects of the program are introduced.

Scott Patterson, RPh, is the owner of **PATTERSON PHARMACY** ([www.pattersonhealthmart.com](http://www.pattersonhealthmart.com)) in Clay Center, Kan. He also owns five other retail pharmacies and a closed-door pharmacy, manages the small local hospital pharmacy, sits on the board of directors for the local bank, and has an ownership position in the local radio station.

To handle it all he is a delegator, saying one of his keys to success is "Hire good people and then let 'em go." Another key is "Hire enough people to do the job and provide them with the tools they need to do it right."

His flagship pharmacy in Clay Center covers about 8,000 square feet and includes a pharmacy equipped with an Innovation robot. He also has a durable medical equipment operation with an attractive showroom supported by a registered nurse and a respiratory therapist. The pharmacy



supplies oxygen, consults on nebulizers, has a large wound care department, sells ostomy and colostomy products, and sets up and services CPAP machines.

Because this is a small town, Patterson looks for other ways to get people to come in. He has a Radio Shack franchise and has converted an old-time soda fountain counter into a coffee bar. The coffee bar stocks a dozen ice cream flavors, which he says is a big draw. And then there is the fudge! The first thing one sees when entering the store is a counter featuring a variety of homemade fudge.

Patterson employs three marketing programs that appeal to my guerilla marketing instincts. First, he has a program designed to generate word-of-mouth recommendations. He hands out an attractive card that allows current customers to fill it out with their name and then give it to someone. When used to fill a new or transferred prescription, both get a \$10 gift card.

Second, he has a supply of wooden nickels. Anytime a customer is inconvenienced, or if a child is being particularly good, staff members hand out wooden nickels which can be redeemed at the coffee bar for a free cup of coffee or small ice cream cone.

***Scott Patterson, owner of Patterson Pharmacy in Clay Center, Kan., uses a variety of methods to attract customers, including homemade fudge.***

Finally, he participates in Mason Natural's free children's vitamin program. Working with local schools, he distributes vouchers the kids take home. Parents are invited to come to the pharmacy to pick up a free 30-count bottle of children's chewable multivitamins.

The cost for all these programs is modest, and Patterson maintains they pay for themselves in increased business.

Our final stop is **HARRIS DRUG** ([www.stores.health-mart.com/HarrisPharmacyRockyFord](http://www.stores.health-mart.com/HarrisPharmacyRockyFord)) in Rocky Ford, Colo. Owner Ky Davis, PharmD, and his staff put in the extra effort it takes to make sure this 4,000-square-foot store is clean, well-lit and attractively merchandized. Davis says that in 2015 he contracted with Gabe Trahan, NCPA's senior director of store operations and marketing, for a front-end overhaul. Davis says the redo, along with new carpeting and better lighting, makes the store look better, and increased sales have more than paid for the cost of Trahan's visit.



**Working with local vendors is emphasized at Harris Drugs. At top right, Glenn Rumrill (left) and John Starcevich stand next to some of the popular T-shirts that are made at an in-house workshop.**

Harris Drug makes it a point to try to work with local vendors. One of them is the sheltered workshop that makes t-shirts. John Starcevich, the front-end manager, showed me one of the best-selling shirts that features the high school mascot—the *Meloners*.

Harris Drug is part of a five-store family chain. According to Davis, one of the most successful things they have done as a group is retain a local ad agency. To find an agency, Davis called the TV station in Colorado Springs and got some recommendations. He now has a professionally trained person working for the chain who develops marketing plans, organizes a calendar of events, and produces high quality ads. And, the best part, according to Davis, is that his total ad spend has actually been reduced.

While the agency helps place radio and newspaper ads, the primary focus is on sending targeted advertisements to people's phones using a technique called geo-fencing. Davis says this process allows him to send specific messages to people's cellphones while they are shopping at Walmart, sitting in their car waiting to pick up their kids, or watching a basketball game at the high school.

Davis says the carefully articulated ads let people know that Harris Drug accepts insurance cards, has competitive prices, and/or fills prescriptions fast. "The goal,"

Davis says, "is to get people to know what Harris Drug does so they will ask themselves the question, why am I standing in line at Walmart when Harris Drug is faster and more convenient?"

Oh, and one final tidbit. Harris offers FlavoRx medication flavoring—and, in keeping with the advice offered previously by Randy McDonough of Towncrest Pharmacy, the pharmacy charges \$2 for the service and says their patients are happy to pay for it.

Well, there you have it. Twelve amazing pharmacies scattered across America's Heartland. Each of them has found different ways to differentiate themselves from the competition and succeed. If there was one aspect of each of these pharmacy visits that stands out to me, it would be that these owners are *optimistic*.

Not once did I hear anyone complain about third-party reimbursement, a new competitor opening in the area, or talk about "the good old days." Each of them faces all of these obstacles yet, somehow, they find a way to look to the future, experiment with new ideas, invest in new services, and move forward.

Thanks again to the Independent Pharmacy Cooperative (IPC) for the financial support it provided to make this trip possible. And, here's hoping something mentioned in this two-part article will help you do more and be better. ■

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