



Berkshire Trade & Commerce: October 2006
John Townes

**Return to Apothecary Roots:
Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy borrows
from past, focuses on future**

LENOX, MA: Two years ago, at a time when independent pharmacies had long since become an endangered species, Larry Browne bucked the trend by purchasing the Lenox Village Pharmacy, one of the few remaining independent drug stores in the central Berkshires.

Browne, whose background is in business development, explained that he saw this as an opportunity to both redefine and return to the roots of what pharmacies used to be.

To better reflect his ongoing efforts in this direction, Browne recently changed the name of the business to Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy, which remains located in the Curtis retail and office complex at 5 Walker Street in the center of Lenox.

"It's a whole philosophy and a very different business model than the prevailing approach of most pharmacies today," said Browne, "In some ways, I feel like we are going back in time to the tradition of the old apothecary shop, while also moving into the future with innovation."

Browne's goal is to emphasize the personalized qualities of a local pharmacy, combined with an expansion into the realm of alternative and natural remedies. The business is also reviving an older practice of creating customized medications on-site through the process of compounding.

Browne emphasized that Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy continues to be a conventional modern drug store in many respects, by filling standard prescriptions for mainstream pharmaceuticals. It can also handle payments through insurers and other health plans.

The difference, he said, is that his business augments this with other options, including alternative products and services to promote wellness, such as natural nutritional supplements, herbal and homeopathic remedies, natural cosmetics and other holistic health-oriented products.

"We deal with the full spectrum of approaches to address the specific needs and preferences of customers," he said. "In a typical pharmacy today, the focus is narrower. The customer comes in, has their prescription filled, and leaves. But here, we focus on individuals rather than a mass market. The idea is that we're here to help, in whatever way a person believes is best for them."

He added that the business also promotes a proactive relationship with patients and health practitioners. "We want to revive the traditional concept of a three-way partnership between the person, their physician and the pharmacist," he said.

Browne cited the practice of compounding medications as an example of this. Compounding is the process of producing customized medications on-site by mixing ingredients in the store. This used to be a common practice, he explained, but it has since been supplanted, with pharmacies serving more as vendors of pre-mixed medications produced by the pharmaceutical industry.

Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy offers compounding as an alternative for those patients who require it, using ingredients purchased from a national compounding association.

"The standard medications manufactured by the pharmaceutical companies are often perfectly fine for most people," he explained. "However, they do not account for differences among individuals. A person may benefit more from some variation of a standard medication, or they may have a specific problem that makes the common version unsuitable for them. A drug may be great for 80 percent of the population, but what if you're in the other 20 percent? The drug companies are not interested in manufacturing variations of products for a very small market."

Compounding makes it possible to take those differences into account, he continued.

"A physician can write a prescription that meets the specific needs of an individual patient. By compounding, the pharmacist can create that for them. It might be a slight variation of the standard formula or a difference in the form it is in. If a person has trouble swallowing a medication, for example, we can compound it into a cream they apply to their skin and absorb it that way."

Two-year evolution

Browne purchased Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy two years ago from Dan Walczyk, who has stayed with the business as managing pharmacist.

Browne said he spent his first year familiarizing himself with the business and developing his plans. Over the past year he began implementing changes. "The differences have become especially noticeable to the public over the last six months," he said.

Browne, who is not a pharmacist, described himself as a specialist in business development. He spent much of his career devising new enterprises for large corporations.

"What is most rewarding for me is the chance to create something that didn't exist before," he said. "That's what I did for corporations, and I wanted to do something on my own."

Browne noted that he had worked for several years for a conventional pharmacy chain in Connecticut, which started him thinking about ways to fill the needs that were being overlooked by modern trends toward chains and consolidation.

"When I heard that Lenox Village Pharmacy might be available, it struck a chord," he said. "It was a chance to put my ideas about what a pharmacy could be into practice. I also like it because it's a people-oriented business."

He noted that Walczyk maintains an essential role, "Dan has the expertise as a pharmacist, while I develop the business concepts," he said. "The relationship is more like a partnership."

Browne added that the sale was also an opportunity for Walczyk to focus on the aspects of the profession that he was particularly interested in. He explained that Walczyk had prior training and certification to do compounding work, and a desire to do more with that. However, before the sale, he had been too busy with the other demands of running the business.

"Compounding has always been a passion of Dan's," said Browne. "We hired another pharmacist to handle the regular prescriptions, which has freed Dan up to develop and oversee our compounding operation."

Redesign and expansion

Over the past year, Browne has been implementing other changes. The layout of the store, which is about 3,000 square feet, has been redesigned to open it up and accom-

modate additional merchandise, including familiar non-prescription drugs and sundries as well as natural and holistic health products. It also created a more efficient sales counter.

“Another goal has been to make it more enjoyable to shop here,” he said. “The new layout is brighter and more inviting. We’ve also added unique gift items.”

Browne has also expanded the size of the pharmacy operation by taking over and adjacent retail space that is approximately the same size of the store. This houses the storage area and workspace for the pharmacy staff. It also includes a new “clean room” where the compounding work is done in a sterile environment.

The business also added equipment to offer a service called Healthy Living Pre-Paks®, which are customized packages that contain all of an individual’s medications and supplements in a form that is arranged by the date and time they are to be taken. “It makes it easier to keep track of medications you take, so you don’t either forget them or take too much,” said Browne.

While it has many of the characteristics of a local neighborhood pharmacy, Browne said Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy is also a regional business. It has a delivery service that serves customers throughout the Berkshires.

In addition to the retail operation, the pharmacy also deals with institutional customers. “We work with organizations like schools and assisted-living facilities to provide medications and other services,” he said. “For example, we have a contract with certain schools to provide medication packets for students with special needs.”

The store has also been presenting talks and other educational events on health-related subjects.

Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy currently has about 20 employees, including pharmacists and staff members with expertise in other facets of health and nutrition, as well as delivery drivers and other retail staff.

While it is a departure from modern trends, Browne believes the concept of Lenox Village Integrative Pharmacy also reflects a growing desire for a return to a more human-scale approach to health care.

“Over time I believe the health industry will go back to a point where they recognize that each customer is a unique individual,” he said. “While our pharmacy is unusual today in our personalized approach, I also see us as being ahead of the times in that sense.” ■