

Pharmacist/Entrepreneur Finds Way to Help Community and His Business

Access to health care is a challenge in rural America. Ellijay pharmacist Steven Purvis knew that his town needed more, so he came up with a solution. “We are a small town with a limited number of doctors. People here do not have as many options for immediate care,” he says.

Purvis is the owner and proprietor of Huff’s Drug Store, an independent pharmacy founded in 1949. When he built a new home for Huff’s across the street, he built out a space in the back for the new SelectCareRx Walk-In Clinic, where clients can be treated for common infections and minor injuries. The medical staff also provides vaccinations, health screenings and other services. The clinic opened in February 2009.

As SelectCareRx began to accept clients, Purvis quickly saw there were differences between managing a retail pharmacy and health care clinic. “I understand all the intricacies of operating a pharmacy, but I found I was facing a steep learning curve with the clinic.” He started looking for advice on managing his new business.

At about the same time, the University of Georgia’s School of Pharmacy had developed its new Independent Pharmacy Management Rotation program. A mutual friend referred Purvis to SBDC consultant Jeff Sanford, the program’s director.

Sanford and two UGA pharmacy students conducted a full financial evaluation of Huff’s pharmacy operations, including a break-even analysis of

the medical clinic. “We spent a solid week evaluating the financial data, what was going on, looking at all types of cost structures,” says Sanford. “When we came back with the report, we showed Steve what the clinic needed to do to make it a profit center for the pharmacy.”

“I like Jeff because he talks very frankly about what needs to be fixed, and he breaks down numbers in a way that makes sense. A clinic can be very expensive to get started. Jeff’s input helped me take some things in different directions and change our

business model to begin to make it profitable,” says Purvis. “Now that our model is closing in on profitability, we hope that it will soon be ready for other independent pharmacies to use in other rural areas. The impact of the SBDC’s work will be huge.”

Purvis has invited other independent pharmacists to take a look at his business model for the clinic, and in fact has received more than a half-dozen calls from those who would like to learn more. By sharing lessons he’s learned, he hopes to improve access to health care around the state.

“When you’re in a small rural community, you’re here to serve the community you live in,” he says. “As long as the clinic is not losing money and I’m serv-

ing the community, I think it’s worth the extra effort.”

Sanford sees these small clinics taking shape around the state, and credits Purvis for leading the way. “The number of new in-store clinics in the U.S. is expected to triple within the next five years. Steve is a pioneer, and more than a good pharmacist, he is a successful entrepreneur. He saw an opportunity and sought outside expertise to help it succeed.”



PRESCRIPTION FOR SUCCESS: Steven Purvis wanted to help his community by opening a health clinic and outside expertise helped him make it profitable.