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PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL GUIMOND



Lytle Pharmacy

SMALL BUSINESS HAS DEEP ROOTS IN THE COMMUNITY

It's a Thursday morning, and Lytle Pharmacy is bustling with locals getting their prescriptions filled and shoppers browsing the new fall decor. It's a pharmacy, but it also has a selection of quality gifts, handmade cards and local items like books and photos.

Robert Lytle enters. He gives a warm greeting in his sports coat and introduces himself.

"I'm Bob Lytle, a registered pharmacist and president of Lytle Pharmacy," he says.

It's a modest response for a man who has authored several books, earned the Michigan Historical Marker for the Opera House Building and is the longest-running owner of this pharmacy.

But owning a pharmacy in a small town, where he could really get to know and help his clients, has always been his dream.

When Lytle was young, his mother developed rheumatoid arthritis and became invalid. It was Lytle's job to pick up her medications from the drugstore.

"Every time I went to pick up medication the pharmacist greeted me warmly and asked how my mom was doing. I noticed he didn't do that just with me, but he did that with everyone. He knew everyone and always had advice for them," Lytle says. "It really impressed me that he was such an important person to so many people, and he offered advice—for free, of course—and from that time on I knew I wanted to have a drugstore in a small town, just like him."

Running an independent pharmacy isn't the easiest job. Lytle says parking has always been a challenge and he doesn't have the same advertising budget as the chains. But the pharmacy's prices are competitive, and his store offers supplies you can't get from a standard manufacturer.

"We compound medications that doctors prescribed—from hormone replacement creams to pain medications," Lytle says. "When doctors find out we

make specific things here, which chain stores won't bother with, doctors will send their patients here."

Patient-specific drugs aren't the only reason the drugstore is one of Rochester's oldest businesses.

"IT'S THE RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE WITH OUR CUSTOMERS," LYTLE SAYS. "PEOPLE LIKE THE FEELING OF A STORE WHERE EVERYONE KNOWS YOU. YOU BECOME PART OF THE COMMUNITY, WARM YOUR WAY INTO THEIR HEARTS AND BECOME THEIR GO-TO PERSON FOR THEIR MEDICAL NEEDS."

Lytle ended up in Rochester after being transferred by his employer in 1968.

"When I saw Rochester, I said this is the town. I knew right from the beginning that this is where I wanted my store," he says.

Lytle continued to work for the chain drugstore but frequented the pharmacy in downtown Rochester on the corner of Main and Fourth Streets.

"I just liked going into the store. It gave me a warm feeling," he continues.

In 1973, the owner of that pharmacy, Dick Morley, died in a tragic plane crash. After the accident, Lytle went to the pharmacy to offer a helping hand to the new owners. The owners had several other pharmacies and were willing to sell. In 1976, Lytle fulfilled his dream and bought the business.

But the property had a new owner, and Lytle worried his new pharmacy would be leased out from underneath him.

In 1985, there was a massive wind storm that caved in the store's iconic front windows. The building's owner didn't want to deal with the repairs and was going to brick it in. But the building is one of the oldest in Rochester and Lytle believed it should be restored to its original glory. Lytle worked with

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the Rochester Downtown Development Authority and bought the building with one condition: he would restore it.

Lytle fixed the windows and rebuilt the exterior, including the iconic Richardson-Romanesque arches. Through Lytle's efforts, the Opera House, as it was originally known, earned a Michigan Historical Marker.

"I've always loved history, and it was really a dream come true," Lytle says.

Lytle's interest in the Civil War and the 1800s, has lead him to author several children's books including three books on Mackinac Island and a time travel story, *Three Rivers Crossing*, which takes place at the Van Hoosen Farm.

"I guess I've always been a writer. I wrote poems and songs in school and for my children, but it wasn't till I was in my late 40s that I wrote my first book," Lytle shares. "Now I visit schools to talk about writing. It's one of my greatest joys."

Lytle spent a fair amount of time at the Van Hoosen Farm when he was working on *Three Rivers Crossing*. It was there he was first introduced to the Rochester Grangers, the farm's vintage baseball team.

"They play by the rules of the 1800s, and even though I had a bad hip and was a little older, they let me play. It's a game played by gentlemen. They don't use mitts, they wear bowties and yell 'hazza' when someone gets a hit,"

he says. "The experience really made me feel connected to this community, whereas before I felt somewhat like an outsider because I wasn't originally from here."

Eventually, Lytle discovered he did have family ties to this community.

"My sister was applying to be a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and needed to trace her lineage to show we had ancestors who fought in the American Revolution," he says. "When she did that, we discovered we were related to the Taylors, some of the original settlers of Stoney Creek Village."

"My life has been full of coincidences," he says with a smile.

Although he's not originally a Rochester native, Lytle has made this town his home and established himself as an essential part of the community.

Lytle has been a member of Rochester Rotary for more than 40 years, volunteered to be a part of the Van Hoosen's Farm Ghost Walks, donated to establish a new gym at Rochester College and frequently gives author talks at local schools. Lytle and his pharmacy are a vital part of the community and one we can all be grateful for.

Lytle Pharmacy, located at 340 S. Main St., is open 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday.

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