

# Modern Apothecary Meets General Store: Community Retail Case Studies

## Overview

Blending a **modern apothecary** (wellness, herbal, and spiritual products) with a **traditional general store** (local pantry staples, artisan foods, household items) has proven successful in certain small towns. These hybrid shops often position themselves as both **curated wellness boutiques** and **practical community markets**, a model famously exemplified by the fictional Rose Apothecary on *Schitt's Creek*. In the show, Rose Apothecary “sells a curated selection of goods from local artisans,” ranging from lip balms and body care to locally made goat cheese <sup>1</sup>. Real-life entrepreneurs have launched similar concepts, especially in **rural or suburbanizing towns** lacking big-box retailers. Many of these businesses embraced **local delivery services** (e.g. Square's local delivery integration) to reach residents at home. Below, we explore real examples, how they appeal to locals, their community alignment, how they choose products (and became “extra pantries”), and how low overhead helps sustain them.

## Examples of Apothecary-General Store Hybrids with Local Delivery

- **Kind Oasis (Milwaukee, WI)** – A “modern apothecary and general store” that opened in 2020 <sup>2</sup>. Kind Oasis carries wellness products like CBD-infused gummies, personal care items, and unique local gifts. It positioned itself as a neighborhood wellness shop and gift store. During the pandemic, Kind Oasis advertised **local delivery and curbside pickup** for Milwaukee-area customers (alongside national shipping), using an online store to reach people at home. This made it easy for residents to get items like calming gummies or artisan treats delivered locally without visiting a crowded shop.
- **Beekman 1802 Mercantile (Sharon Springs, NY)** – A “world-famous store in the middle of nowhere” (a rural town of 528 people) <sup>3</sup> founded by two NYC transplants. Beekman 1802 started as a goat farm and launched an on-site mercantile selling goat-milk soaps, skincare, and local farm foods <sup>4</sup>. Over time it added local snacks and home goods (fig balsamic vinegar, handmade jam, honey, artisan ceramics, etc.) under a chic brand. This mercantile mirrors the apothecary-general store blend: goat milk **beauty products alongside pantry staples**. They built a national e-commerce presence and offer shipping, but local residents also treat the store as a source for quality local dairy and gifts. (While their focus is shipping orders worldwide, the Mercantile has offered curbside pickup and local service during events, effectively serving both tourists and its tiny community.)
- **Sheepscot General (Whitefield, ME)** – A revived rural general store with a modern twist. Opened in 2011 with just **\$15,000 of stock**, owners Ben and Taryn Marcus transformed an old farm store into a **21st-century general store** <sup>5</sup>. They stock organic farm produce, Maine-made yogurt and cheese, bulk foods, and also host an apothecary section (herbal teas, natural remedies) in partnership with a local herb farm. The store became a **community hub** – elders gather weekly for coffee, and the

owners introduced a lending library, yoga classes and art workshops on-site <sup>5</sup>. Sheepscot General's evolution shows how combining practical groceries with wellness and community activities can make a small store the *"cornerstone of the community."* During COVID-19, like many rural grocers, they pivoted to curbside pickup and likely *informal local delivery* to ensure neighbors got essentials. (Indeed, throughout rural New England, general stores rapidly adopted curbside/local delivery for their towns, even *"long before national supermarket chains did"* <sup>6</sup>.) Sheepscot's low inventory overhead and farm location helped it survive on modest volume until the community fully embraced it.

- **The Mockingbird Apothecary & General Store (Longwood, FL)** – A suburban example in a small Florida town. Mockingbird Apothecary carries **all-natural, non-toxic products for bath, body, and home** and eco-friendly household goods <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>. As a "general store," it offers a bit of everything healthy – from vegan personal care and essential oils to pantry items like organic spices or local honey. The owner curates items that are safe and botanical-based, appealing to wellness-focused families. Mockingbird offers nationwide shipping and notes that it **"offers delivery"** (likely local delivery in its area) <sup>9</sup>. By delivering orders locally, it effectively became a convenient source for everyday natural products for residents around town.

*Other emerging examples:* **The Happy Thistle** (Chattanooga, TN) calls itself an apothecary & general store, blending herbal teas, handcrafted bath products, and even fresh flower delivery. **High Noon General Store** (Santa Fe, NM) mixes wellness items (sage smudge wands, teas) with home goods and snacks in an upscale "everyday essentials" shop, and ensures *"no matter your budget, you can leave with something"* <sup>10</sup>. These cases show the trend's geographic range – from rural villages to artsy small cities – all leveraging a similar hybrid model.

## Appealing to Local Residents

To succeed, these businesses position themselves in ways that resonate deeply with their local community:

- **Nostalgia Meets Modern Needs:** Many lean into the nostalgia of the old general store, which carries emotional appeal in small towns. Owners often describe themselves as reviving *"old-fashioned"* values of neighborly service and one-stop convenience <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>. At the same time, they stock modern, high-quality goods (organic foods, clean skincare, etc.), delivering a *"wholesome brand of luxury"* in a down-home package <sup>13</sup>. This balance assures older residents that the store is a friendly, familiar spot while attracting younger shoppers with fresh, trendy products. For example, Maine's new general stores explicitly avoid being too precious or upscale; they focus on practical local goods and everyday usefulness <sup>14</sup>.
- **Local Sourcing and Unique Products:** These shops heavily feature **local artisans and producers**, giving residents a sense of community pride. By carrying area farm products, locally roasted coffee, handmade crafts, or regionally made candles and soaps, the store becomes a showcase of local talent. This appeals to "buy local" sensibilities and ensures the inventory includes items *not available at chain supermarkets*. Rose Apothecary's concept in the show was exactly that – sell the best local cheeses, jams, and self-care items under one roof <sup>1</sup>. In real life, Beekman 1802 did this by selling their farm's cheese and inviting other local makers' goods (jams, honey, pottery) into their mercantile

<sup>4</sup> . Residents appreciate finding specialty foods or gifts with a local story, rather than generic mass-market goods.

- **Trust and Expertise in Wellness:** The apothecary aspect helps position these stores as **trusted advisors** on health trends and remedies. In communities without a big health food store or pharmacy, a “modern apothecary” fills an important gap. Owners often have backgrounds or passion in herbal medicine, CBD, or holistic health. They host conversations and workshops to educate customers (for example, Rising Tides Apothecary in Rhode Island held wellness workshops and spent time talking one-on-one about topics like sleep and stress <sup>15</sup> ). By being approachable and knowledgeable, the store gains *personal trust*. Local residents come not just to buy a vitamin or crystal, but to ask the owner for advice on a tea for better sleep or a balm for pain. This **relationship-driven approach** builds loyalty in a way big retailers cannot. As one apothecary owner put it: *“I thrive on deep interaction with my customers... pairing them with the exact right products is the most fun”* <sup>16</sup> . Such attentive service converts curious locals into regulars.
- **Community Hub Vibe:** Successful hybrid stores often double as **social spaces or community centers**. They might include a small café or coffee counter, seating areas, or host events (readings, craft nights, open-mic events). This encourages locals to treat the store as a “*third place*” – not home, not work, but a relaxed gathering spot. Sheepsfoot General’s cafe and weekly coffee gatherings are a prime example, as is Rose Apothecary’s fictional open-mic night to draw in more townsfolk. Even if space is limited, owners find creative ways to foster community: Kind Oasis in Milwaukee organized holiday pop-ups and invited local authors for book signings <sup>17</sup> , while High Noon in Santa Fe collaborates with local designers and even coined a fun aesthetic to spark conversation <sup>18</sup> . By positioning as “*more than a store – an experience*,” these businesses make themselves beloved fixtures of community life, not just retail shops <sup>19</sup> . Locals feel a sense of ownership and pride in “our local general store.”
- **Accessibility and Convenience:** To truly appeal to *all* local residents, these stores ensure they carry everyday necessities and affordable options, not just high-end niche items. For instance, High Noon General’s owner specifically wanted a store that felt **authentic to Santa Fe but also like a breath of fresh air**, with contemporary products at various price points <sup>20</sup> . “*No matter what your budget is, you can leave with something*,” she says <sup>10</sup> . This approach prevents the store from being seen as only for wealthy newcomers or tourists. Likewise, carrying basic pantry staples (coffee, bread, baking essentials, toiletries) makes the shop relevant to residents’ daily needs. The mix of “*elevating the everyday*” – selling beautiful, eco-friendly versions of daily goods – means locals might buy their dish soap or cereal there, not just gifts. By integrating the mundane with the artisanal, the store becomes a practical stop for households, increasing its value to the community.

## Small-Town Alignment: Philosophy and Psychology

In semi-rural, community-centric towns (like Richmond, IL – rural but slowly suburbanizing and without big-box stores), a blended apothecary-general store fits naturally into the local psyche:

- **Community Self-Reliance:** Such towns often have a strong ethic of self-reliance and helping neighbors. A local general store embodies that spirit by providing for the community’s needs under one roof. During crises, this became very clear – “*villages divided their towns into grids*” to check on

vulnerable residents, and “general stores shifted to curbside delivery” early on to ensure everyone could get supplies <sup>6</sup> . Residents psychologically associate the store with **safety and support**. Knowing there’s a friendly local shop to call for groceries or remedies in a pinch is deeply reassuring, especially when the nearest Walmart or chain grocery might be 20+ miles away. This aligns with the “rural ethos – a constellation of compassion, pragmatism, and solidarity” that researchers observed in tight-knit towns <sup>21</sup> . A community-focused store taps into that ethos, positioning itself as part of the town’s cooperative fabric.

- **Nostalgia and Identity:** In places not served by big retailers, people often cherish the *memory* or *idea* of an old general store where everyone knows each other. Reviving that in a modern form gives the town a sense of identity. As noted in Maine’s general store renaissance, “more often than not, the new old general store is born of nostalgia” <sup>12</sup> . In Richmond, IL or similar towns, an apothecary-general store could play on historical themes (perhaps the town once had a pharmacy or general store) – creating continuity with the past. Psychologically, this tells locals “our town still has a heart and heritage.” It’s a point of pride and differentiator from homogenized suburbs. Townsfolk may prefer to give business to “our own local mercantile” rather than drive to a distant chain, out of loyalty and local patriotism.
- **Holistic Lifestyle in a Rural Setting:** Interestingly, rural/suburbanizing communities are increasingly interested in the same wellness trends seen in cities (organic food, herbal remedies, yoga, etc.), but they have fewer outlets to pursue them. A modern apothecary-general store aligns with the desire for a **healthy, sustainable lifestyle** without abandoning rural simplicity. It’s philosophically consistent: many rural residents already value home remedies, gardening, and nature – an herbal apothecary appeals to those values, just packaged in a more modern way. For example, Sheepscot’s owners were young farmers into “old-fashioned things like home canning, local foods and shared community” <sup>22</sup> – exactly the values their rural neighbors appreciated too. In a town like Richmond, which is “community-centered” by description, a store that sells natural wellness products alongside feed and flour might feel perfectly at home. It says: you can buy your sage smudge stick and your maple syrup in one trip – nurturing body and soul, which resonates with both the practical and spiritual sides of small-town life.
- **Personal Relationships:** In small towns, business is personal. The philosophical alignment comes from the owner being an **embedded community member** – the person who remembers your name and asks about your family. Apothecary-general stores tend to be owner-operated, so customers develop a relationship with the proprietor who might also be their neighbor. This dynamic builds trust and a sense of mutual obligation. People shop there not just for the product, but to support *Mary’s store* or *the Smith family’s shop*. Over time, the store almost becomes a public service as much as a business, reinforcing communal values over pure commerce. This feeling is absent with impersonal big-box stores. In Richmond, IL, which lacks big retail, a friendly general store can become a linchpin of daily life – where the cashier chats about local news and the bulletin board lists town events. Such psychological warmth greatly endears the store to residents.

In summary, these hybrid stores thrive in small towns by **blending old and new** – old-time community spirit and new-wave wellness – in a way that feels natural and positive to residents. They strengthen local identity and offer an *alternative to distant corporate shopping*, which fulfills both practical needs and deeper psychological needs for connection and tradition.

## “Extra Pantry” for Locals: Becoming the Go-To Store

Several of these businesses effectively became an “**extra pantry**” for people in their towns. By stocking everyday consumables and offering on-demand service, they make themselves an extension of residents’ kitchens and medicine cabinets:

- **Everyday Staples on Hand:** The key is carrying staple goods so that locals can rely on the store for last-minute needs. This often includes basics like milk, eggs, bread, butter, canned goods, coffee, flour, and toiletries – in addition to the more niche artisan items. For instance, Sheepscot General kept “*coolers full of items like Maine-made yogurts and cheeses*” alongside its cafe <sup>23</sup>, ensuring residents didn’t have to leave town for quality dairy. Many of these stores also carry things like locally baked bread, honey, and even cleaning supplies or paper goods. By having a bit of everything, the store acts as the “**backup pantry**” when you run out of sugar or need a quick dinner ingredient. Customers learn that “if I forgot something, I can probably get it at the general store.” This convenience creates habit – locals stop in regularly to restock small quantities, which drives steady business.
- **Local Delivery of Groceries and Goods:** Integrating **local delivery services** has supercharged this “extra pantry” role. By offering same-day delivery of not just restaurant food but retail goods, these shops let residents replenish necessities without leaving home. Square’s online store platform made this easier during the pandemic – it introduced an on-demand delivery feature (partnering with couriers like Postmates) so that even a tiny general store could dispatch a local driver when an order came in <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup>. For example, a customer in town could order a few grocery items, a herbal cough syrup, and a loaf of bread from the store’s website, and have it on their porch within an hour. This effectively makes the store an **on-call pantry**. DoorDash and other delivery apps also expanded to retail: they encourage shops to list “*everyday supplies and goods*” so customers can get them delivered same-day <sup>26</sup>. One beauty-supply shop owner on DoorDash noted, “*I get the order, I fulfill it, they come and pick it up and deliver it*” <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> – a simple process that any general store can use now. In small towns, where major delivery services often don’t operate, a local store that offers delivery is a game-changer. Elderly or busy residents love the option to have their pantry staples or prescriptions brought to their door by someone they know, rather than driving 30 minutes.
- **Fulfilling Emergency Needs:** Being an “extra pantry” also means stepping up in emergencies or odd hours. Many general store hybrids take pride in helping residents when they’re in a bind – whether it’s staying open late for a last-minute item or offering credit/delivery during a snowstorm. In rural areas, it’s not uncommon for the store owner to personally drop off groceries to a housebound neighbor (even without a tech platform). This creates a **deep reservoir of goodwill**. During COVID, numerous stories emerged of rural grocers and general stores doing home deliveries of everything from prescriptions to pantry bags for those quarantining <sup>6</sup>. By meeting such critical needs, the store cements its status as the community’s extra pantry and even pharmacy. People know they can count on the store, which in turn builds loyalty and word-of-mouth support.
- **Curation to Avoid “Stock-out”:** As an extra pantry, these stores also learn exactly which products locals use most and make sure to keep them in stock. For example, if many townspeople are avid bakers, the store will ensure a good supply of flour, sugar, and baking powder. If the nearest big grocery is far, the store might carry a little fresh produce or meat from local farms to save residents a trip. Owners often solicit feedback – “*What items do you wish you didn’t have to drive out of town for?*” –

and then bring those in. Over time, the product mix aligns closely with the community's cooking and wellness habits. This can be highly location-specific. (One store discovered a local demand for regional staples like pickled okra and made sure to stock it, for instance.) By listening and responding, the shop literally becomes an extension of each household's pantry, stocking what neighbors are likely to run out of. It's common to hear locals say, *"Oh, I'll just have the general store deliver it"* – treating the shop as part of their home supply chain.

In essence, **convenience and reliability** define the "extra pantry" role. These stores succeed when locals perceive them as the *easiest way to get what I need*, whether by a quick stop-in or a quick delivery. It requires smart stocking of staples and offering friendly, flexible service. Achieving that means the difference between being a nice occasional boutique and an indispensable community resource.

## Curating the Right Products (How Owners Know What Sells)

Figuring out which products people will actually buy (and even order for delivery) is crucial. Successful owners use several tactics to identify demand and curate inventory:

- **Pulse of the Community:** Owners keep a **close ear to customer feedback**. In a small-town store, every conversation is market research. For instance, Katie Frank of Rising Tides Apothecary noted she had her *"finger on the pulse of what our community needs and is interested in"* by hosting interactive wellness workshops <sup>15</sup>. Fast sell-outs of a lymphatic drainage workshop told her there was high interest in related products. Similarly, if multiple customers ask, "Do you carry oat milk?" or mention driving far to get a certain herbal supplement, a savvy owner takes note and brings those in. Many will simply ask patrons, *"What products would you like us to stock?"* via social media polls or in-store chats. This responsive approach ensures the inventory aligns with real local demand, not just the owner's guesses.
- **Filling Local Gaps:** A smart product strategy is to identify **goods the community wants but can't easily get nearby**. This often means semi-urban luxuries or specialized items not carried by the lone grocery store or gas station in the area. For example, a town might have a supermarket but no health food store – so the general store stocks gluten-free flours, herbal tinctures, kombucha, and vegan snacks. Or perhaps there's nowhere local to buy a nice birthday gift – so they carry artisanal candles, cards, and jewelry. In Santa Fe, High Noon's owner realized there was a *"hole in the market for a youthful, contemporary, and affordable shop"* near the tourist plaza <sup>20</sup>, so she curated hip apparel, funky home goods, and organic chocolates to fit that niche. In Richmond, IL, an owner might see that while residents can drive to chain grocers for bulk shopping, there's nowhere in-town to get, say, organic baby food, specialty tea, or handmade soap – and thus the store can supply those. By complementing rather than duplicating what's already available, they ensure people have a reason to choose their store.
- **Cross-Over Products:** The blend of apothecary and general store allows for **creative cross-over products** that serve dual purposes. Owners often pick inventory that ties wellness to daily life. For example, an apothecary-general store might stock locally roasted coffee infused with adaptogenic herbs, or cleaning sprays made with essential oils – items that are both household staples and wellness-oriented. These tend to intrigue customers and become best-sellers because they check multiple boxes. A person coming in for bread might also pick up an immune-boosting elderberry jam. Such synergies were evident at Beekman 1802 Mercantile, where goat-milk soap (personal care)

and goat cheese (food) sat side by side, reinforcing a holistic lifestyle theme <sup>4</sup>. **Seasonal specialties** are also curated – e.g. winter wellness kits (vitamin C, soup mixes, bath soaks) or summer BBQ local sauces – anticipating seasonal needs of the community.

- **Iterative Stocking and Analytics:** These small businesses must be nimble. Owners often start with limited SKUs and **test what sells**, then double-down on winners. Sheepscot General began with a modest selection and expanded as it saw community embrace certain items <sup>5</sup>. Today it brims with what locals use most (dairy, produce, bulk foods). Many use their POS or online store data to see trends – e.g., if herbal tea blends are selling more than expected, they'll introduce new flavors. Conversely, if a product line (say, high-end skincare) isn't moving, they may phase it out in favor of something people ask for (like affordable lotions or first-aid salves). The beauty of using Square or similar systems is the sales history is tracked: it helps identify which products people even order for delivery. For instance, an owner might discover via online orders that **toilet paper and cold medicine** are frequently requested for delivery during winter – a sign to always keep those stocked and perhaps bundle them for convenience.
- **Personal Passion (tempered by pragmatism):** Many owners initially stock what *they* love – after all, the store is often an extension of their lifestyle. This passion ensures authenticity (the store's offerings have a story and a purpose). However, they must reconcile it with what the *community at large* will buy regularly. The best owners blend the two: they introduce new products they believe in, but observe whether those catch on. If an owner strongly believes in, say, crystal healing, they might dedicate a small corner to crystals and see if locals show interest. If yes, great – if not, they might scale it back and allocate space to more requested items. Over time, the product mix can evolve to be a tailored balance between the unique vision of the shop and the practical preferences of its customer base. As one business advisor quipped: a store can be “*a very specific store*” with a clear vibe **and** still be a general store meeting broad needs <sup>19</sup> – finding that mix is an art. The lesson learned is to **curate with flexibility**: start with a vision, but let customer behavior fine-tune the selection.

In short, owners learn what people will actually order or buy by staying deeply engaged with their clientele and community trends. By being both **curators and listeners**, they stock the right balance of wellness products and pantry goods. This customer-informed curation is critical, especially if they're going to successfully drive local delivery orders (where people typically order necessities or specific desired items). The stores that mastered this saw consistent sales, as they were essentially *selling exactly what their neighbors wanted* – nothing more, nothing less.

## Low-Overhead, Low-Volume Sustainability

A common thread among these hybrid stores is a **lean cost structure** that allows them to survive on lower sales volume than a typical retailer might need. Here's how lower overhead makes lower sales viable:

- **Small Footprint, Lower Rent:** Many of these businesses operate in small, affordable locations – a historic storefront, part of a farm, or a side-street shop. Rent or mortgage costs are often low, especially compared to urban retail. For example, Sheepscot General reopened in a disused farm store building (likely with a very minimal lease given the property owner's support) and started with only \$15k inventory <sup>5</sup>. With such low initial overhead, the pressure to generate huge sales was

reduced. In Richmond, IL or similar towns, commercial rents are relatively cheap, and sometimes the owners *own the building* or use a family property, which drastically lowers fixed costs. This means even modest daily sales can cover expenses.

- **Owner-Operated (Minimal Staffing):** These are usually **mom-and-pop operations**, often run by the founders with maybe one or two part-time helpers or family members. Payroll expense is tiny or nonexistent (aside from the owners drawing a modest salary). With no need to pay a large staff, the store can remain profitable at low volume, as long as the owners are meeting their personal income needs. It's essentially a *lifestyle business*: lower sales are sustainable because expectations are aligned to a small scale. Many owners also wear multiple hats – they are the buyer, cashier, stocker, and marketer in one. This can be tiring, but it saves money. And because the community often respects the hard work of an owner-operator, some even volunteer help or accept slightly shorter business hours, etc., understanding it's a small outfit.
- **Complementary Income Streams:** Some hybrid stores bolster their sustainability by **adding revenue streams that carry low overhead**. A popular one is a café or food counter inside the store – since they are already sourcing local food, they can sell coffee, sandwiches, or baked goods for additional income, leveraging the same space. Classes and events (like paid workshops or farm dinners) can bring in extra cash and use the store premises when retail hours are slow. Sheepscot General did this with yoga and art classes and a pizza night, turning community events into modest profit centers <sup>5</sup>. Others run an online store (e-commerce) reaching customers beyond their town. This is where Square Online or Etsy comes in – with the same inventory, they can make extra sales nationwide, effectively increasing volume without increasing local foot traffic. The **combination of local and online sales** helps even out the revenue. Importantly, these added streams utilize existing inventory or skills, so they don't add huge costs.
- **Inventory Management and Low Waste:** Small general stores can keep a tight rein on inventory expenses. They often purchase in small batches and may work with local producers on consignment (paying for goods only after they sell). This reduces the cash tied up in stock and avoids large unsold surpluses. Perishable goods are limited or quickly repurposed (a produce that doesn't sell might be used in the cafe soup, for example). With lower overhead, they don't need to buy in massive bulk just to get lower unit costs – they can afford to buy what they know will sell. This careful management means **inventory shrinkage and waste are minimal**, improving the effective margins even on lower sales. Also, by focusing on some higher-margin items (like wellness products or prepared foods), they offset the thinner margins on commodity staples.
- **Community Support and Patience:** Because these stores often enjoy community goodwill, locals may be willing to accept slightly higher prices on some items (understanding they're supporting a neighbor and not driving far). This *informal subsidy* helps the store's margins. Moreover, many of these owners didn't expect to get rich quick; they approached it with a mindset of gradual growth and multiple micro-revenue sources. The case of Sheepscot General shows that within two years of opening on a shoestring, it had grown significantly and solidified its role <sup>5</sup>. It's likely that *lower overhead gave it that runway* to build a customer base without going under in year one. Likewise, the Beekman 1802 Mercantile benefited from the owners' farm providing the core product (soap and cheese), which kept costs low and allowed them time to gain fame well beyond their town. **Patience and low costs** go hand in hand – these businesses can survive slow months because their break-even point is lower than a high-flying retail startup in a city.



In summary, the *low-overhead model (small space, self-operated, careful stock)* means these stores don't need massive sales volume to stay afloat. A few dozen transactions a day, or a loyal base of repeat customers, can be enough. By staying scrappy and community-focused, they turn what might seem like a very small market into a sustainable enterprise. The lesson for others is that **scaling down expectations and expenses** can make a hyper-local store financially viable where a bigger-budget approach might fail. Lower sales volume is not a problem when your costs are proportionally low and your community is rallying behind you.

## Integrating Local Delivery: Approaches and Impact

A notable feature of these modern general stores is how they leveraged **local delivery services** (especially during COVID-19) to expand their reach:

- **Square Online and On-Demand Couriers:** Many small retailers turned to **Square's local delivery integration** as a lifeline. Square enabled any seller to offer delivery by dispatching couriers (through partners like Postmates and DoorDash) for online orders <sup>24</sup>. This meant a little apothecary-general store could add a "Delivery" option at checkout on their website, and when a local customer ordered, a gig driver would pick it up from the store and bring it over. Square charged a low flat fee (e.g. \$1.50) plus the courier cost, which the store could pass to the customer <sup>29</sup>. The **benefit** was controlling the customer relationship (orders came through the store's own site) and avoiding the high commissions of third-party marketplaces <sup>24</sup> <sup>30</sup>. For example, if Kind Oasis took an order for CBD gummies and a scented candle from someone 3 miles away, the owner would get a notification, pack the items, and a Postmates driver would deliver them – all arranged seamlessly via Square. This kept customers ordering directly from the local store, rather than through a generic app, and helped the business *"retain customers during [the] downturn"* as one Square beta tester noted <sup>31</sup>.
- **Third-Party Marketplaces (DoorDash, Instacart):** Some stores also list their inventory on broader delivery apps that people already use for shopping. DoorDash, for instance, created a **"DoorDash for Retail"** program encouraging shops to join so customers can *"get everyday supplies and goods delivered same-day"* <sup>32</sup>. A general store could sign up as a "Convenience" or "Retail" partner on such apps. The advantage is visibility – local residents browsing DoorDash or Instacart for groceries might stumble on the local apothecary-general store's offerings. For example, a customer might be searching for "honey" or "cold medicine" on Instacart and see it offered by the local general store, alongside the big grocers. This captures sales the store might otherwise miss. During the pandemic, even pharmacies and hardware stores in small towns joined delivery apps to reach customers. The challenge here is the fees – these platforms charge commissions, but some store owners found it worth it for the incremental sales. It also attracts *new* customers who hadn't shopped at the store before (they discover it online, then perhaps become direct customers later).
- **In-House Delivery and Curbside:** Not all delivery has to be via tech partners. A number of these businesses simply set up **curbside pickup and owner-operated delivery** by phone or Facebook orders. For instance, a store might post on the town Facebook group: "Call in your order and we'll deliver free within 5 miles." In tight-knit communities, this informal system worked well. The store's staff (or family) might deliver every evening at 5pm, for example. This approach keeps costs even lower (no middleman fees), though it's logistically limited by how far the owner can drive. Still, it helped stores like Sheepscot General or local apothecaries to serve elderly customers who couldn't risk in-person shopping. In Vermont and other rural areas, these improvised delivery networks popped up because the community expected their general store to step up – and they did <sup>6</sup>. Some,

like Mockingbird Apothecary, likely offered free local delivery for orders over a certain amount, basically as a customer service. Curbside pickup (order ahead, park outside the store) also became standard and satisfied those who wanted zero-contact transactions. The overall effect was that these stores **didn't lose their customer base to fear or convenience** – they met customers where they were comfortable.

- **Beyond Food: Delivering Unique Goods:** By using delivery, these stores tapped into non-traditional delivered goods. People usually think of delivery for hot meals or large grocery orders, but here we saw things like *herbal tinctures, crystals, craft kits, and boutique gifts* being delivered. This unlocked new revenue: someone stuck at home might decide to have a care package of tea, vitamins, and cookies sent to their friend from the local shop. Kind Oasis, for example, advertised “to-go gift boxes” with local delivery during the holidays <sup>33</sup>. The ability to get even a small gift or single product delivered made the store a go-to for more than emergencies. It also positioned the store as a **local alternative to Amazon** – need a birthday present or ran out of bath salts? Your local general store can get it to you today, with a human touch. This keeps dollars local and reinforces the store's role as an all-purpose supplier.

In summary, integrating local delivery **expanded the market radius** of these small stores and added a layer of convenience that modern consumers appreciate. It helped them attract both the homebound grandmother and the busy parent who prefers to order online. Importantly, the stores that embraced delivery did so in a way that maintained their community feel (often the person delivering might be the owner or a known employee, or a friendly courier who becomes familiar). This technology-enabled service has now become a standard expectation – many of these towns will likely continue to use local delivery for general store goods even post-pandemic, because it proved so convenient. The lesson learned: *even the smallest retailer can utilize online ordering and local courier networks to serve customers beyond their four walls* – turning a quaint general store into a multi-channel retailer without losing its soul.

## Lessons Learned and Key Takeaways

- **Curate a Unique Mix, But Cover the Basics:** The modern apothecary-general store thrives by **curating products** that big-box retailers or pharmacies don't offer (handcrafted, local, organic, niche wellness items) <sup>1</sup>. This uniqueness draws interest. However, to become an “extra pantry,” the store also stocks everyday staples and practical items residents need <sup>23</sup>. The **lesson** is to balance the “wow, cool!” products with the “I actually need this” products. Being both special and useful cements loyalty.
- **Position as a Community Hub:** These stores succeeded when they became gathering places and symbols of community identity. Hosting events, providing a space to chat, and engaging with local culture made the store *more than a store – an experience* <sup>19</sup>. This emotional connection protects the business: customers support it not just as consumers, but as neighbors invested in its survival. **Appeal to local pride and create a welcoming environment**, and the town will embrace you.
- **Embrace Local Delivery and Online Tools:** A big innovation was the adoption of tech usually reserved for larger companies. By using **Square Online's delivery dispatch or partnering with apps**, tiny stores leveled the playing field in convenience <sup>24</sup> <sup>29</sup>. This taught us that *omnichannel retail isn't only for the big guys*. Small businesses can and should offer online ordering, curbside

pickup, and local delivery – it expands their reach on slow days and meets modern customer expectations. Investing a little time to set these up can yield significant returns in customer satisfaction and sales.

- **Leverage Low Overhead to Incubate the Business:** Many case studies show that starting lean and local allowed the concept to prove itself. With **low overhead costs**, these stores could survive on thin margins initially and grow organically through word-of-mouth <sup>5</sup>. The “*slow money*” approach – growing community by community, rather than scaling up fast – meant they could adjust their model to what locals wanted without burning through cash. Keeping expenses low (small space, few staff, smart inventory) is a formula that made lower sales volume sustainable.
- **Know Your Customers (Really Well):** The intimate scale of these operations is actually an advantage. Owners often know customers by name and **solicit their input regularly**, allowing the product mix and services to closely fit local needs <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>. This customer-centric approach resulted in, for example, stocking the one brand of gluten-free cookie that the few celiac families in town love, or opening on Sunday afternoons because that’s when weekenders come by. Big chains can’t tailor that finely. The lesson: **constant two-way communication** with customers is gold. It leads to smart stocking, loyal patrons, and fewer missteps.
- **Values and Authenticity Matter:** Whether it’s prioritizing local women-owned and eco-friendly goods like High Noon General Store <sup>34</sup> or championing “buy local” farming like Sheepscot General <sup>11</sup> <sup>22</sup>, these businesses wear their values on their sleeve. In community-centered towns, a clear ethos (sustainability, wellness, community support) resonates. It gives people a *philosophical reason* to shop there. Being authentic in mission – not just trying to cash in – builds trust. As seen with Rose Apothecary (even if fictitious), having a strong brand vibe and message “*that talk to your customer*” completes the immersive experience <sup>35</sup>. **Consistency in aesthetic and ethos** makes the store memorable and “sticky” in customers’ minds.
- **Adapt and Diversify to Survive:** External conditions will change (be it a pandemic, new competition, or shifting demographics in town). The examples show these small businesses that lasted were quick to adapt – adding delivery, expanding into e-commerce, adjusting hours, or offering new services (like pharmacy items or meal kits) when needed <sup>6</sup>. Some incorporated as cooperatives or got community investors to further root themselves. **Flexibility** is key: treat the business as an evolving community service rather than a fixed-format store. This way, when needs change, the store can pivot – as many did in 2020 by selling groceries and toilet paper when those were in demand.

In conclusion, the blend of a modern apothecary and a general store can indeed flourish in a rural/suburban community setting. It requires passion for local wellness, a finger on the pulse of the community, and a willingness to merge old-fashioned service with new-fashioned technology. The reward is a business that is **economically resilient** (through diversified offerings and low overhead) and **socially impactful** (a beloved “second pantry” and gathering spot for the town). These case studies show a path for entrepreneurs in small towns: by filling both the **material and psychological needs** of residents, a small hybrid store can create outsized value – becoming nothing less than the heart of its community.

**Sources:** Supporting information and examples were drawn from real case studies and articles, including local news features on general store revivals and interviews with owners: Milwaukee Magazine’s profile of Kind Oasis <sup>2</sup>; the Press Herald on Maine general stores like Sheepscot General <sup>5</sup> <sup>14</sup>; *The Nation* on rural

stores' pandemic response <sup>6</sup> ; an IntoTheGloss feature linking Schitt's Creek to Beekman 1802 <sup>4</sup> <sup>3</sup> ; and first-hand statements from small business owners on community engagement <sup>15</sup> <sup>10</sup> . These illustrate the strategies and outcomes discussed. Each business may be unique, but the common lessons are clear: **root yourself in the community, serve its needs wholeheartedly, and don't be afraid to do things differently – success will follow.** <sup>2</sup> <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> **If You Loved Schitt's Creek, You Need To Know About This Beauty Collab | Into The Gloss**  
<https://intothegloss.com/2020/11/schitts-creek-rose-apothecary-beekman-1802/>

<sup>2</sup> <sup>17</sup> **How to Shop Food and Beverage This Small Business Saturday**  
<https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/how-to-shop-food-and-beverage-this-small-business-saturday/>

<sup>5</sup> <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> **Retail renaissance: Maine's new old general stores**  
<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>22</sup> <https://www.pressherald.com/2014/12/21/retail-renaissance-maines-new-old-general-stores/>  
<sup>23</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <sup>21</sup> **Covid Has Left Deep Wounds in America's Rural Communities | The Nation**  
<https://www.thenation.com/article/society/covid-vermont-rural-response/>

<sup>7</sup> **The Mockingbird Apothecary & General Store - Longwood, FL**  
<https://nextdoor.com/pages/nu-natural-llc/>

<sup>8</sup> **Mockingbird Apothecary - Facebook**  
<https://www.facebook.com/mockingbirdapothecary/>

<sup>9</sup> **The Mockingbird Apothecary & General Store - MapQuest**  
<https://www.mapquest.com/us/florida/the-mockingbird-apothecary-general-store-369400163>

<sup>10</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>20</sup> **High Noon General Store Elevates Everyday Life in Santa Fe**  
<sup>34</sup> <https://www.newmexicomagazine.org/blog/post/santa-fe-high-noon-general-store/>

<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> **How Rising Tides Apothecary Provided Wellness With Square Online**  
<https://www.websitebuilderexpert.com/interviews/rising-tides-apothecary/>

<sup>19</sup> <sup>35</sup> **Five Business Lessons You Need To Learn From Rose Apothecary on Schitt's Creek - Finn & Gray**  
<https://finnandgray.com/business-lessons-schitts-creek-rose-apothecary/>

<sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>29</sup> **Square announces On-Demand Delivery for Square Online Store sellers**  
<sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> <https://squareup.com/us/en/press/on-demand-delivery-sos>

<sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> **Add Local Retail Delivery and Pickup to Your Shop | DoorDash for Merchants**  
<sup>32</sup> <https://merchants.doordash.com/en-us/business/retail>

<sup>33</sup> **#milmaggiveaway: One \$150 gift certificate to Kind Oasis! \_\_ Kind ...**  
[https://www.instagram.com/milwaukeeemag/p/CIBQAkdpY8r/?locale=hi\\_IN%2F&hl=am-et](https://www.instagram.com/milwaukeeemag/p/CIBQAkdpY8r/?locale=hi_IN%2F&hl=am-et)