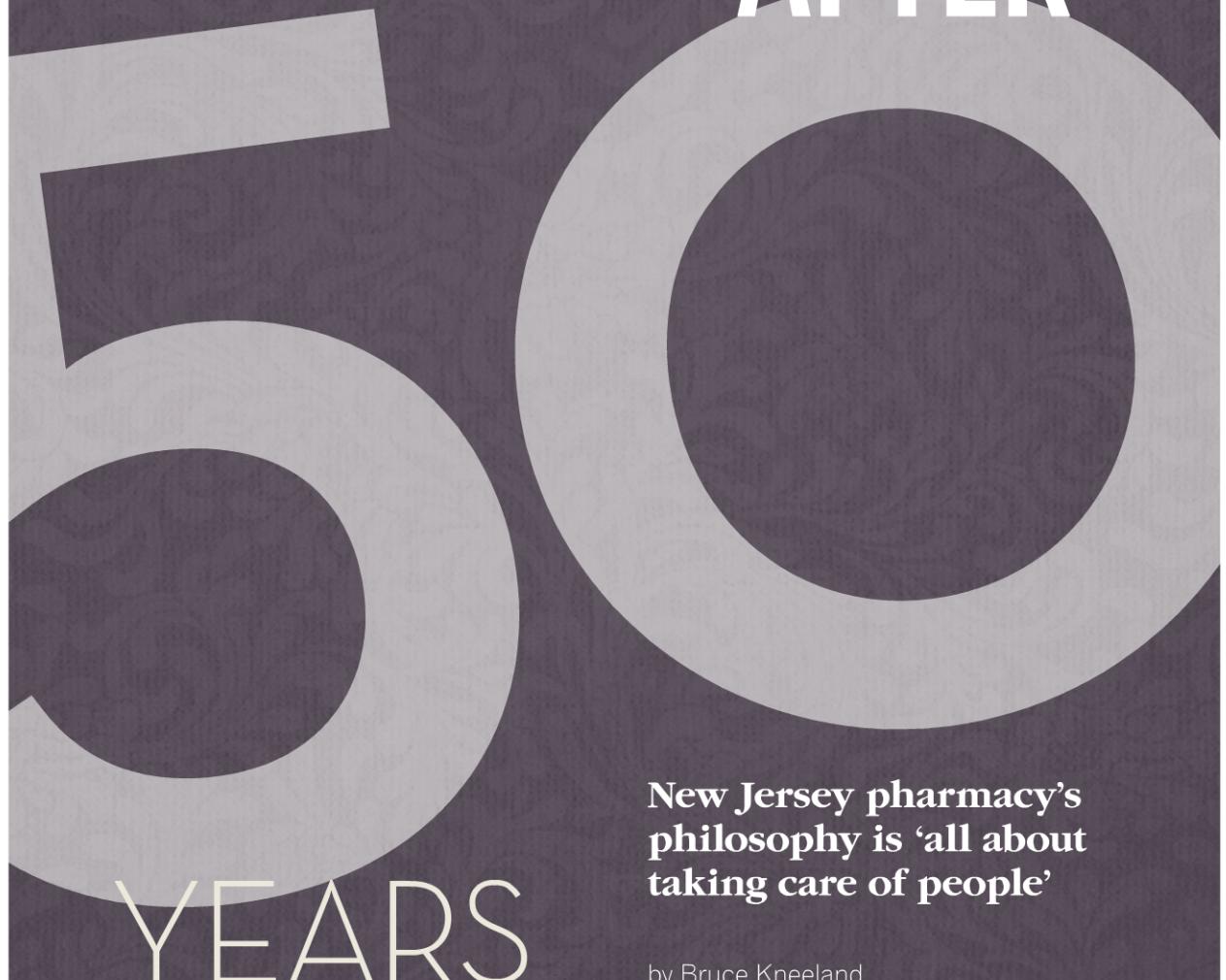


STILL  
*Saiff*  
AFTER



YEARS

New Jersey pharmacy's  
philosophy is 'all about  
taking care of people'

by Bruce Kneeland

Ivan Saiff, RPh, bought Dakelman's Pharmacy more than 50 years ago in the summer of 1963. Shortly thereafter he changed the name to reflect his ownership. Ever since then he has helped it grow and evolve into what is today: a successful independent pharmacy on the bustling main street of Highland Park, NJ.

I had a chance to visit Saiff and his partner, Vijay Maktal, RPh, on a bright sunny day in September, and learn firsthand a few of his secrets for success. But first a few details about Saiff himself.

Ivan Saiff is 79 years old and is still excited about the future. About 10 years ago he entered into a partnership agreement with Maktal. The two of them have become a model for effective ownership transfer. They meld together well in their commitment to exceptional pharmacist care, community service, sound financial management all combined with a shared vision for the future. The partnership is serving the people of this community well.

Make no mistake about the ease of operating in this community. Highland Park sits right between Newark and New Brunswick, N.J.; and, as part of a major metropolitan area; it is flush with competitors. One block away from Saiff Drugs is another independent dedicated to compounding. And right across the street, on a prime corner lot, is a Rite Aid.

In commenting on the Rite Aid, Saiff says, with typical independent pharmacy owner gusto, that having Rite Aid buy out the former Drug Fair across the street in 2004, "is one of the best things that has ever happened to me." He adds, "Never does a



**Ivan Saiff (right) and partner Vijay Maktel have kept Saiff Pharmacy thriving in a competitive environment.**

week go by where a Rite Aid customer comes in asking for a product or for information they were unable to obtain there."

So, what makes this 2,000-square-foot pharmacy in the middle of the block "tick?" Three things were stated quickly when I asked this question. "We provide good customer service; we are active in and support our community; and, if people are ever looking for something we go out of our way to find it," Saiff says."

I admit that all sounds pretty simple, and much like the formula for success I would hear from any other successful independent. So, I dug a bit deeper to find examples of ways Saiff has

accomplished this task and here is what I learned.

#### **LOCAL PRESENCE**

Saiff is a dedicated member of the chamber of commerce. He has chaired the town's Labor Day parade. He knows state and local politicians, and he and Maktal are certified surgical hose fitters. They offer free local delivery and provide MTM (with plans to expand this service). During bad weather they find ways to deliver necessary medications to their customers. They stock a variety of diabetes support items, recommend nutritional supplements, and they even provide a notary service.

Saiff says other "things" are also necessary for success, but he adds, lack



**Saiff proudly displays on his office wall the numerous awards and accolades the pharmacy has received.**

of competition is not one of them. To stay viable he belongs to his wholesaler's cooperative and takes advantage of their sales flyers and private label program. He is a dedicated supporter of his buying group, saying that being a compliant member of the group (and encouraging others do the same) ensures they get the best prices on necessary items. And he adds, getting a rebate check from the group each quarter is important to his ongoing financial success.

Maktal says they also take advantage of technology. They have their pharmacy management system fully integrated with their POS. Using reports generated from both systems and taking advantage of his wholesaler's support services, they stock the right front-end items in the right quantity at the right price. He says this improves sales in the both the front end and the pharmacy.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTED**

Maktal adds that one of the best technology things they have done in

recent months is enroll in NCPA's Digital Pharmacist Solution, powered by RxWiki. He says the posts the service provides keep people coming back to the site and they often hear positive customers comment about their page.

What's next? Durable medical equipment seems to be the growth engine for the immediate future, Saiff says. They are preparing plans that will allow them to knock down the wall and take over space from the store next door. With the added space, they will dramatically improve the presentation and number of DME items they showcase, sell and service.

Details on the partnership ownership transfer plan were shared only in broad strokes, but it is clear the two pharmacists have come to terms with a transition plan that keeps them both committed to current and future success. They did say that when they struck their "junior partnership deal" a few years ago Maktal was given a minority interest in the store, along with a manager's salary. Saiff retained controlling interest but cut way back on his hours. Saiff now lives in

Florida but comes into town two or three days a month to help in the pharmacy, do community relations work, and coordinate plans with Makta.

#### **DEDICATION TO PROFESSION**

One other element of Saiff's management philosophies also struck me as central to his success: that being his dedication to the profession. Saiff proudly hangs on his office wall various plaques he received as president of the New Jersey Pharmacist Association, the Bowl of Hygeia Award, and numerous other awards provided for service to various groups. In commenting on them he laments that too few pharmacy owners are participating in various associations. He says he thinks it is hard for them to realize that while volunteer service requires sacrifice, what one gains in terms of networking and insight into problem solving can help them become more profitable. Sounds like good advice to me.

Learn more about Saiff Drugs at [www.saiffdrugs.com](http://www.saiffdrugs.com) ■

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