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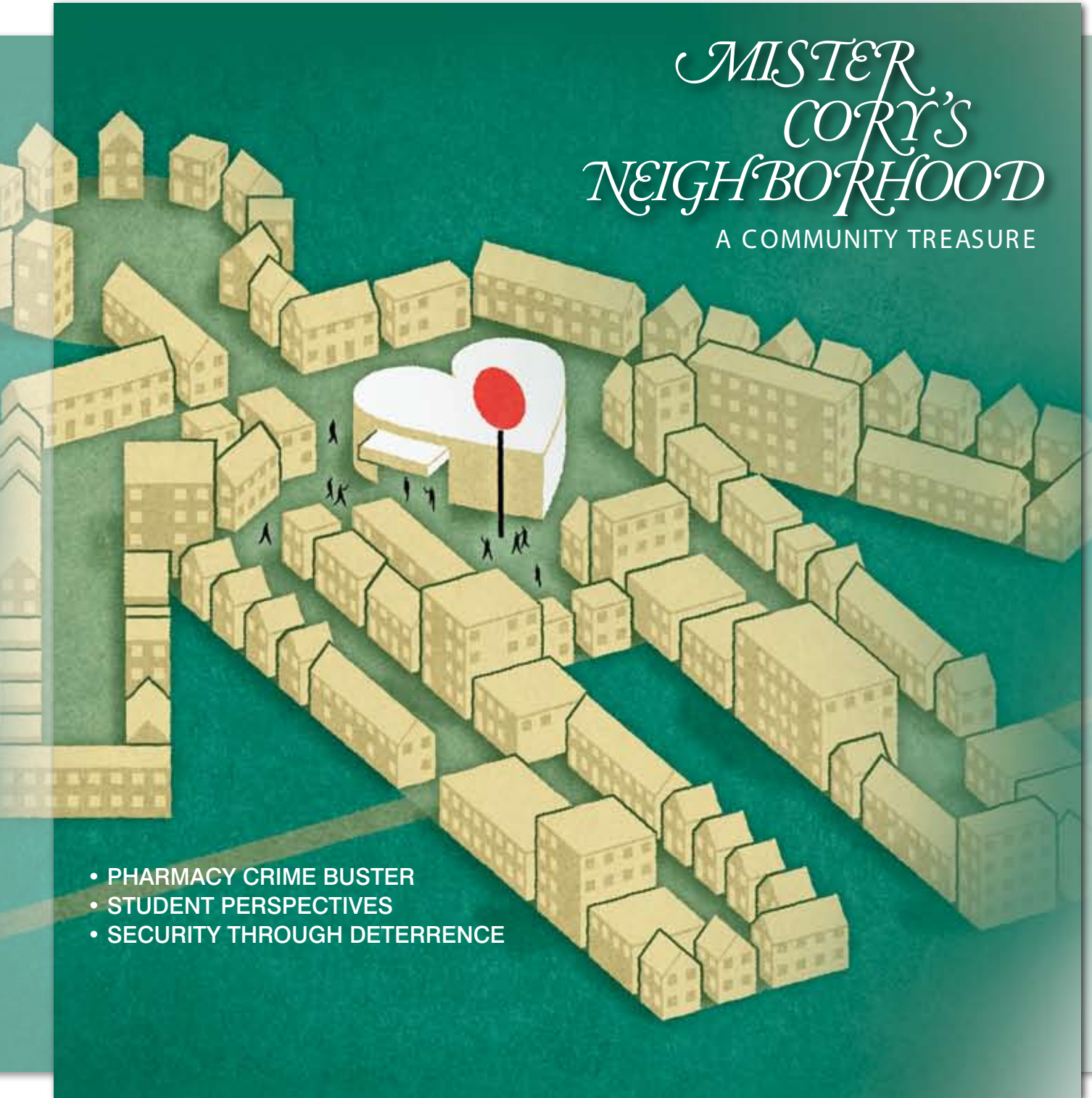
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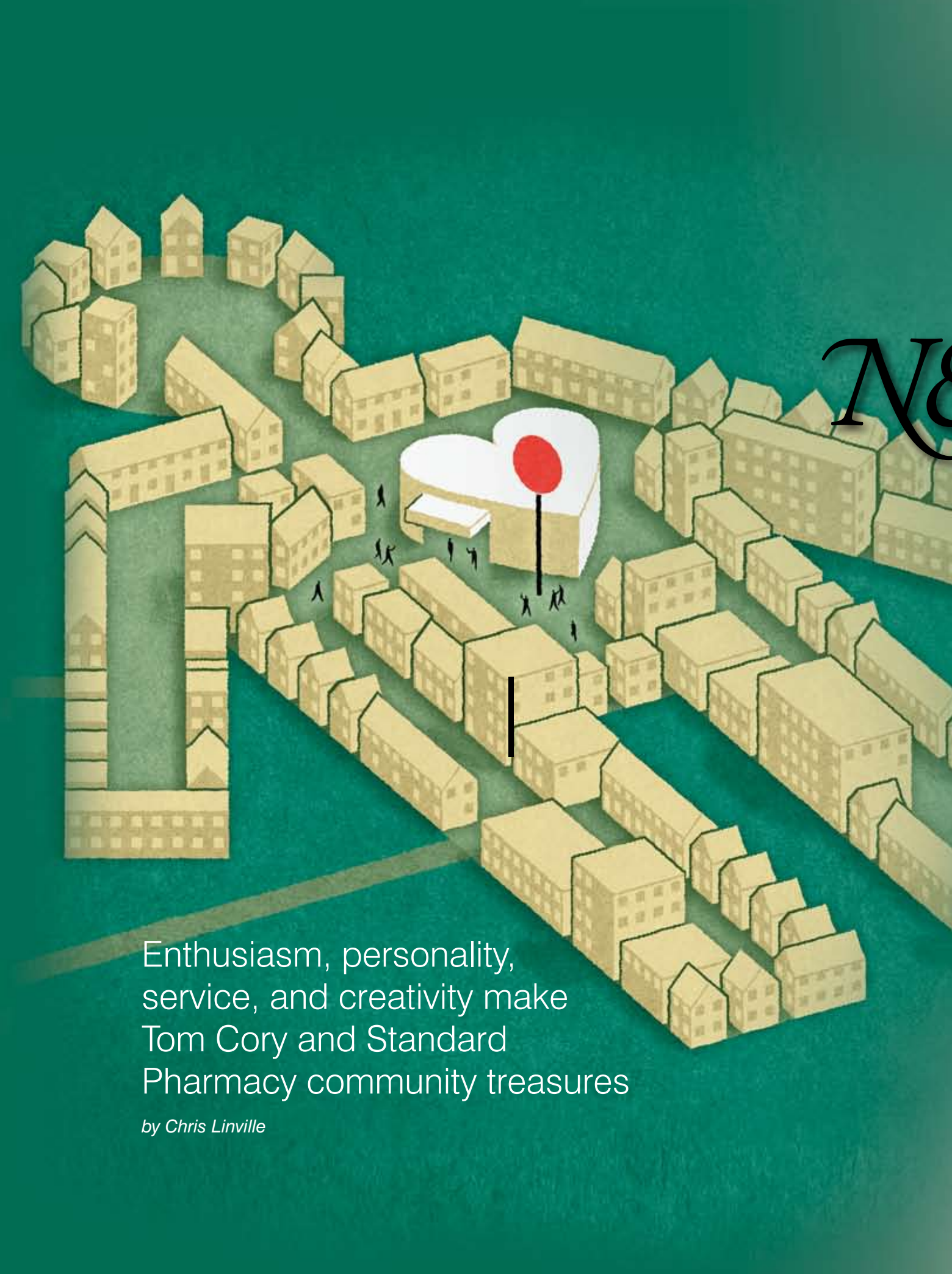
MISTER CORY'S NEIGHBORHOOD

A COMMUNITY TREASURE



- PHARMACY CRIME BUSTER
- STUDENT PERSPECTIVES
- SECURITY THROUGH DETERRENCE

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An isometric illustration of a city block. The buildings are yellow with black outlines and are arranged in a grid pattern. In the center of the block is a white building with a red circular sign on top, representing a pharmacy. Several small black figures of people are scattered throughout the block, some walking on the streets. The background is a solid teal color.

Enthusiasm, personality,
service, and creativity make
Tom Cory and Standard
Pharmacy community treasures

by Chris Linville

MISTER CORY'S NEIGHBORHOOD



*I*t's said that a pessimist sees a glass as half empty, and an optimist views it as half full. As for Tom Cory, RPh, you'll probably need a bigger glass to keep the water from spilling over the top.

Cory, born and raised in Fall River, Massachusetts, is owner of Standard Pharmacy, located only a few blocks away from where he grew up. He describes himself as "the local guy who made good and came home."

And if you're seeking the definition of the prototypical community pharmacist, look no further than Cory. "I know people's date of births; I know people's anniversaries. I know what people are going to do this weekend," he says. "They know what I'm going to be doing. We have a very close relationship with a lot of our patients."

Cory's boundless enthusiasm, along with some low-cost, high-reward marketing, has helped his hometown pharmacy prosper to the tune of about \$4.1 million in annual sales—and growing. "We're doing more than we ever did," he says.

Fall River is a city of some 85,000 residents, about 50 miles south of Boston, and 20 miles east of Providence, Rhode Island. Cory says that Standard is the oldest continuously operating pharmacy in town, having opened in 1919. He is the only full-time pharmacist, but receives some extra help with some pharmacists who he shares with a couple of other area independents. "We're all colleagues, and we do a lot of joint things," Cory says.

As for the rest of the staff, Cory has two technicians and five sales associates. Prescriptions account for 99 percent of the business, though he also offers OTC items, lottery tickets, money order services, delivery, postage stamps, blood pressure monitoring, flu shots, and insurance counseling for Medicare Part D programs. "It's just a local neighborhood pharmacy," Cory says. "We try to take care of neighborhood needs."

An example of that can be found in Standard's durable medical equipment offerings. Cory keeps a limited stock of items such as shower chairs, commodes, walkers, and canes. "If a person has hip surgery, and needs a walker or raised toilet seat, I just give it to him," he says. "When they are done with it, they bring it back; we give it a steam cleaning, and package it up for the next person. On commodes we ask them to buy a new pail for \$5.95.

"So, do I sell a lot of DME? No. I don't because I provide it, and when they are done with it, they give it back and it goes out to the next patient. It doesn't make me a lot of money, but it makes me a lot of goodwill."

Cory's work in the community is appreciated. In 2005, he was given the Community Service Award by People Inc, an organization that works with the disabled and disadvantaged in the Fall River area. He was also the 2005 recipient of the Bank Five/WSAR Hometown Hero Award. The award was established to recognize individuals for heroic deeds, acts of kindness, and selfless efforts to make the community a better place. He is extremely

active in numerous other civic, health care, church, and community organizations.

Cory's efforts have also been recognized by his professional peers. He was selected as the 2006 "Bowl of Hygeia Award" winner by the Massachusetts Independent Pharmacists Association for his community service. He completed a two-year term as president of the association in 2008, and currently serves as chairman of its board of directors.

'The Only Business I Know'

Cory says that pharmacy "is the only business I know." His first job was at 16 as a soda jerk and delivery boy at Brows Drug Store in Fall River. He earned his degree from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy in 1979 and went to work for Adams Drug, a chain affiliate of what is now Rite-Aid. Later he joined Rite-Aid and spent four years as a store opener in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, staying at each new pharmacy for six to eight weeks before moving on to the next stop.

In 1988, he began working part time at Standard Pharmacy. Being single, he would work seven days a week for nine months and have plenty of free time in the summers. "I have several nieces and nephews, and every day we would go to the beach or to the movies, or play mini-golf," he says. "I didn't want the time to go by; those were some of the best years of my life."

At Standard, Cory worked for long-time owners Joe and Janice Rebello (Janice's father had owned the store previously.) Cory describes the pharmacy as being the "Original Polish Drug Store." Next door was the Polish market, and around the corner was the local Polish social club—the Pulaski Hall.

"We have patients who have been coming in for 40 or 50 years, and their parents came here before them," he says.

In 2006, with the advent of Medicare Part D, Joe Rebello decided it might be the right time to step aside. In May of that year, Cory became owner. He says that when it comes to integrity, his former boss and mentor set the bar high.

"Joe Rebello was the standard to measure all gentlemen," he says. "He was well known and admired in the community. It takes an hour to leave a function if you are with him. He stops and chats with everybody. He taught me well."

Promotional Programs

After he became Standard's owner, Cory had some definite ideas about how he wanted to run the business. "We are con-

stantly moving toward improved customer service through employee development, but I don't have a specific plan for this," he says. "But, what we do is work some unusual programs to keep our patients happy and coming back."

In August 2007, after the pharmacy had been remodeled, Cory took advantage of a new tax deduction and acquired a ScriptPro automation unit. Concluding that the machine needed a name, he began calling it Mr. Wilson. Although some people think the name was taken from the movie "Cast Away," or the comic strip "Dennis the Menace," Cory says. "I joke that it's Harold Wilson, former prime minister of England."

Actually, he says that it was named in honor of a loyal and loving pet dog named The Duke. "I said my next dog was going to be 'Mr. Wilson.' And since I'm not going to get a dog, my robot became Mr. Wilson. That's the story."

Mr. Wilson has been quite a hit since its debut, and Cory likes to show it off. "We filled one of the cells with M&M's," he says. "People come in, and we invite everyone to the back. And, if they've never seen it before, we give them a demonstration. We fill a vial with the M&M's for them, and they get to take them home. It also comes with a message, saying, 'This is a gift from Mr. Wilson to his neighbors. Please stop by again.'"

Cory's long-term marketing plan primarily focuses on seasonal, anniversary, and holiday themes. For example, on his phone system's interactive voice response, if you call in March you'll likely hear a St. Patrick's Day-oriented message. With the pharmacy now 90 years old, Cory is promoting it by adding a line on his prescription bags to make patients aware of the anniversary.

Standard also has a specially tailored promotion for almost every month of the year. In January, Cory had 1,000 recyclable grocery bags produced, and at the beginning of the year, every customer was given a few bags. They are royal blue with the store's logo on one side. He jokes, "I tell them to always walk with the Standard Pharmacy logo on the outside." The bags were so popular that he ordered another 1,000.

In February, Cory purchased small Whitman's samplers, had them wrapped for Valentine's Day, and then included a red heart-shaped sticker

that read, "With all my love, Tom, @ Standard Pharmacy." These were placed in the prescription bags of female customers who came to the store the week of Valentine's Day. Additionally, Cory had custom-produced lip balms done with a pink wrapper that read "Happy Valentine's" along with its logo. And, they were given to the patients with the line "So your lips will be ready for the Valentine Kiss."

In March, St Patrick's Day is celebrated by inviting the community in for "green" mallasadas—a Portuguese fried donut. (Fall River has a substantial number of residents of Portuguese descent.)

"The bakery up the street from me makes them exclusively for us, and this year I had 50 dozen on order," Cory says. "We advertised on both the English and Portuguese radio stations to have the listeners stop by and celebrate my Irish heritage at Standard O'Pharmacy. The community stops by and has a mallasada and coffee. It gives us exposure, and an opportunity to chat with guests. Also, I fill Mr. Wilson with green M&M's and dispense them to all who come in."

In April, Standard provides a "Tax Relief" package. The pharmacy puts together a small white bag with a bottle of aspirin—either 100 doses at 325 mg, or 36 lo-dose and a package of lifesavers. Cory has stickers to apply to the bags, and they were distributed the week of April 15.

"In May, we provide a 60 ml custom-packaged hand lotion to all the mothers, and in June, we provide a travel-size shave cream for all the fathers with a sticker that reads, 'Happy Father's Day.'"

July and August are popular months for sunscreen, but Cory says, "We don't sell it, we give it away. I have



Radio Days

With his outgoing personality, Tom Cory would seem a natural for show business. Well, it's not Broadway, but for the last four years, Cory has been on the radio with fellow pharmacist Tom Pasternak as stars of the "Tom and Tom Pharmacy Show" on WSAR 1480 AM in Fall River.

"Tom started the show in August of 2005," Cory says. "He would have different people—after about the third week, I went on with him for the half hour. About every third week I was one of the guests. We have heads of state associations on the show, doctors, various health care workers. We do anything that we can relate to health care."

The show started out as a half-hour program every Friday at 1 p.m. It has since expanded to an hour. Cory was able to adjust his schedule to free him up for the show. For a while he was sole host as Pasternak was recuperating from hip surgery. Pasternak also has a long-term care business that sometimes keeps him from appearing.

"So, we're together at least once a month, and sometimes he'll call in if he can't get out of the store," Cory says. "Also, we're now live streaming on the Web (WSAR.

com), so you can listen from anywhere. Along with local physicians, we've had people from around the country. In November we do a big 'quit smoking' program. Pfizer got a doctor from Tennessee to speak about that. We've had physicians from Los Angeles call on different things."

Cory says planning varies based on the topics and if any guests are scheduled. He usually prepares for several hours on Wednesday night prior to the Friday show. Along with guests, they also take phone calls during the show. "Some weeks we get a lot; some we don't get any," he says.

Receiving positive feedback from topics discussed on the show is particularly rewarding. Based on a suggestion, one show focused on the difference between asthma, emphysema, and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). Not long after, Cory appeared at a local health fair—he was a vendor—when a woman approached him. "She said, 'Tom, that was great what you did on COPD. I'm a biller at the hospital, and I never had it clear in my mind what the differences were until you said it.' I thanked her and joked with her that it was good to know that there's at least



one other listener other than my mother."

"Even without sponsors, the show is relatively inexpensive to produce," Cory says. A month of shows (about four hours of radio time) is \$275, which Cory splits with Pasternak. Other than an occasional July 4 that falls on that day, or the odd pre-emption by a Boston Red Sox broadcast, the show is a stalwart on Friday afternoons.

Cory kiddingly assigns his audience with listener numbers. One caller might be listener 14, and another might be listener 88. "In my dreams we have five million listeners—and we're getting closer, one at a time," he says with a laugh.

"If I meet somebody at the market, they might be listener 168. Then I make sure on that Friday's show, that's who listener number 168 is. It kind of goes over well in the community."

"[Radio] is just a great opportunity," he says. "I really enjoy it."

—CL

60 ml bottles of SPF 15 custom-packaged sunscreen for all my patients, another round of lip balm with an SPF 15, and custom-imprinted beach balls for all the children. I'm a redhead who uses lots of sunscreen, and I figure everybody needs sunscreen. So, we decided we would just give it out."

In 2008, Cory provided full-size, custom imprinted beach towels for all of his patients. The towels have tropical scenes with the pharmacy's name, and cost about \$16 each. He gave away about 200. Cory says, "I tell customers, if you get your picture taken with the beach towel and get it in color on the front page of any local

newspaper, I will take that person and a guest to the best restaurant they can find within 50 miles of Fall River.” So far, he hasn’t had to spring for dinner, but Cory says it was a fun idea.

For back-to-school season in September, Standard provides 10 packs of imprinted pencils to the local backpack programs in Fall River. October has two primary promotions. “First we fill our ScriptPro 200 with orange M&M’s and dispense M&M prescriptions to everyone the week of Halloween,” Cory says. “Ten pounds of M&M’s will do about 300 prescriptions (30 M&M’s per vial), and I have custom-imprinted Hershey Bars printed for distribution.

“Then on Halloween day itself, we allow everyone who comes to the pharmacy in costume to pick out a candy bar of their choice. It is amazing how many children remember that they must go to the drug store on Halloween.”

November features packaging with stickers encouraging customers to vote. In December, Standard gives away calendars and sends custom Christmas cards to all of its patients. “The 2008 Christmas card was a picture of the exterior of the pharmacy placed on a beach background,” Cory says. “The cards were printed in English, Polish, and Portuguese. I mailed over 400 cards. It was quite a hit.”

Return on Investment

Cory says his marketing and promotional programs are relatively inexpensive. A local company does all of his imprinted images, whether they are Chap Sticks, pens, hand lotions, or sun screens.

He says also, “Every one of my patients has CVS Care cards on their key rings. They go there for shampoo, and motor oil, but not once have I ever had a therapeutic duplication or ingredient duplication message come back while filling a prescription. So, I guess that means they trust me on the prescriptions.”

Cory is certainly a believer in a time-honored business adage, saying, “It’s a lot easier to keep an existing customer than it is to replace them and find new customers.”

He admits that it takes a certain mindset to make his efforts work. The ideas for the monthly promotions? “I’m the crazy one who came up with those.”

He adds, “You have to have the personality to go along with it. Somebody once commented to me, ‘You



never go to work, do you?’ I said, ‘No, I go to the store.’ That’s probably why I couldn’t have a second store, because I don’t know if I can split myself in half. I’d have to find another pharmacist with a personality like mine.”

Cory also admits that some people might think he’s a bit over the top, but he says, “If it brings a smile to their face, if the patients go out feeling happy, if they are looking forward to coming again, that’s the personality that I have,” he says. “You have to be able to deliver the line with the pink Chap Stick. ‘This is to keep your lips ready.’ Not everybody can do that. You have to have the personality to do it. I wasn’t born with it; it’s something that’s developed over the years. I’ve got five fingers on my hand, just like everybody else. I have no special abilities.”

Like many pharmacies, Standard is closed on Sunday. But, Cory applies the neighborhood twist on this as well. On his IVR, it says that he spends Sundays and holidays with his family.

“People like the idea that I go home on Sundays,” Cory says. “One of the things I tell the pharmacists here is that you never put a sign up that says ‘closed.’ You’re ‘spending time with your family and friends.’ No one will ever get mad at you for that.” *ap*

Chris Linville is managing editor of *America's Pharmacist*.