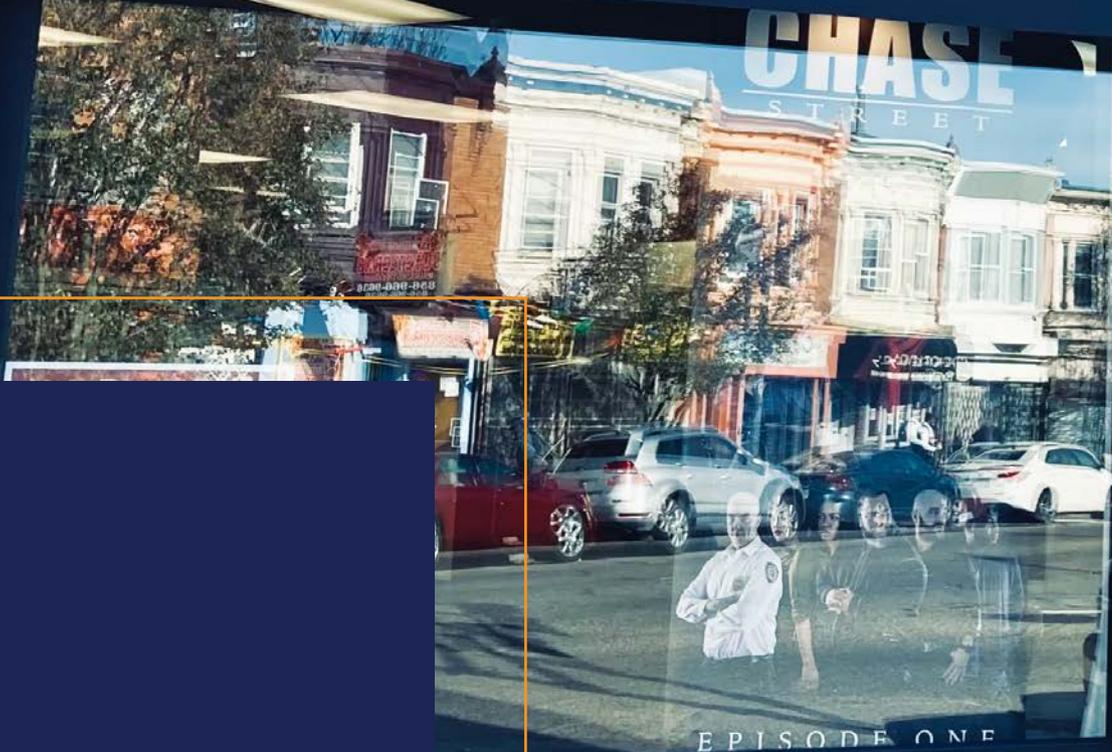


# Rexall



# MOVING FORWARD BY LOOKING BACK



## Bell Pharmacy gets a new school makeover with an old-school look

by Chris Linville



Bell Pharmacy has witnessed plenty in its 90-plus years in Camden, N.J. It opened Jan. 19, 1931, as Bell Drug Company on the southwest corner of Haddon and Kaighn Ave., in the city's Parkside neighborhood. In the mid-1940s it was rebranded as a Rexall-authorized agent and continued under that banner through the Rexall company's eventual closure.

Much has changed in the city during the pharmacy's history, says Anthony "Tony" Minniti, RPh, who owns the pharmacy with his sister Marian Minniti Morton. One constant, however, has been the landmark building located at one of its most important and highly visible intersections. The urban unrest and ensuing riots of the late 1960s and '70s decimated Camden and caused the owners to cover the building's marble facia with stucco. The ground floor's plate glass windows were covered with cinderblock and plywood. The second-story windows were sealed up with sheets of corrugated steel.

Tony, a 1993 graduate of the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, says the once-proud building remained in this "bunker-like" state until 2020, when he and Marian committed to restoring the building to its original grandeur. (Bell Pharmacy's transformation was recognized as a 2022 NICE Award winner for Best External Modification. See the March 2022 *America's Pharmacist*® at [bit.ly/5thniceawards](https://bit.ly/5thniceawards) for complete coverage of all the NICE Award winners.)



### THE TRANSFORMATION

As the renovations started, the previous modifications were removed. The ground floor plate glass windows and second-story windows were restored. Unfortunately, the original marble fascia was beyond repair but was replaced with a sleek pewter exterior insulation finishing system. The iconic 1940s-era porcelain Rexall signs were cleaned, repaired, and remounted in their original locations. The second story limestone was cleaned, repaired, and sealed. Period lighting was added to second story to create a bright corner oasis on what was once one of the darkest evening corners on Haddon Ave. While the original Bell Rexall Drugs neon sign could not be replaced due to zoning restrictions, a newly fabricated replica was installed on the second story, around the center window. The renovations were completed in May 2021, a “labor of love,” as Tony says.

Gabe Trahan, former NCPA senior director of store operations and marketing, has visited hundreds of stores over the years. He is known for his brutal honesty when judging a pharmacy’s look, yet he was effusive with his praise for Bell Pharmacy.

“Lighting, windows, new paint, refurbished signs, billboards removed, new windows everywhere, additional sign on the second story, and a senior-friendly railing at the entrance,” he says. “Congratulations. Your new look says, ‘We are not just surviving; we are thriving! Come on in!’ This took guts!”

### RETURN TO GLORY

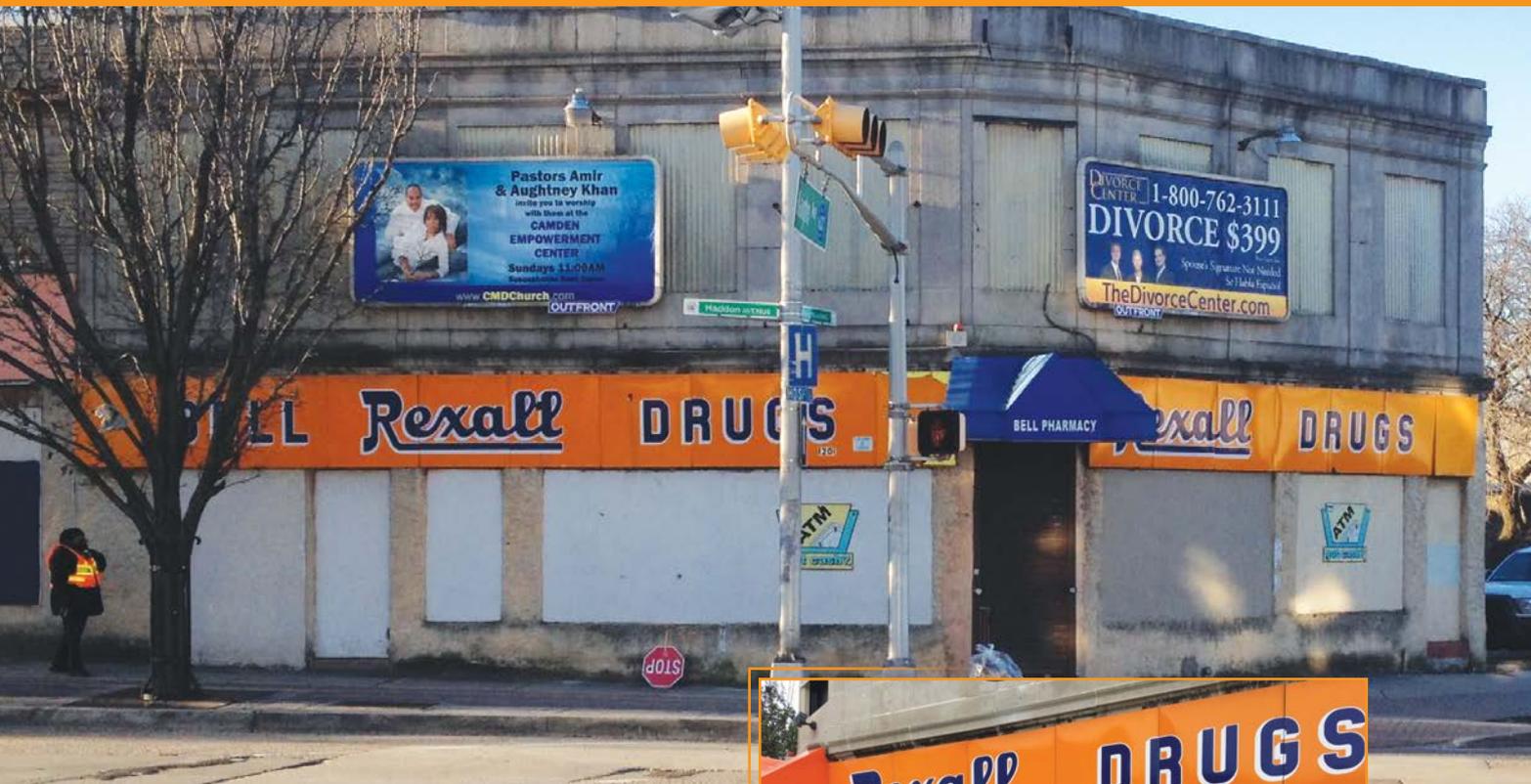
Tony, who serves as vice president of the New Jersey Pharmacists Association, says Camden is being reborn and the once “most dangerous city in America” is experiencing a renaissance. However, much of the city’s historic architecture is beyond repair or is being lost as new development replaces what once existed.

“Many of the residents who have been here for generations, while excited that the city is doing better, lament that so many landmarks are being lost and important buildings that they remember for their past are disappearing,” Tony says. “There was an overall approach that as Camden — hopefully — returns to its former glory, that pieces of its history could also return to their former glory from its time and not be lost to redevelopment.”

### PRESERVING HISTORY

The Minniti family is committed to doing all they can to preserve some piece of “Old Camden.” That dedication is reflected in the restoration of Bell Pharmacy.

“What we really wanted to emphasize was the importance of not just the business but the building to the city



Old

in general, but the Parkside neighborhood in particular,” Tony says.

Bell Pharmacy has always been family owned, and Tony and Marian are the third family to own it (and a couple of other family members also work there also). But Tony says, “I don’t really think of us as owning the pharmacy, I consider us as stewards of the pharmacy. That’s why so much care went into restoring the structure to what’s widely considered to be its heyday in the 1940s and 1950s. It’s always easier to knock things down and rebuild something new, but the response from the neighborhood we’ve received, the outpouring of gratitude and the support from them because we actually restored this to the way they remembered it, has been overwhelming. We have grandparents and great-grandparents bringing their children in to see it.”

### AN ICONIC BRAND

Tony says the Rexall name is iconic, and that’s why he embraces it.

“Rexall was kind of Americana,” he says. “Every movie you watched in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s, if there was a Main Street scene there was a Rexall Pharmacy. And they are all but gone now. To actually see a real Rexall Pharmacy, it’s just extraordinarily rare.”

Tony says he wants to keep the Rexall name alive. “We really held on to that branding, and we went to great lengths to preserve all the Rexall artifacts that we had,

not just in the exterior of the store but in the interior,” he says. “Having the windows and reincorporating that feeling of having the pharmacy integrated into the community as opposed to how it was during the tougher years of Camden, it’s just really helped bring a vibrancy to the neighborhood and it’s just been terrific.”

Tony says he was pleasantly surprised by the good condition of the signage. With some careful cleaning and polishing, the colors just popped.

“We kind of stayed away from repainting or doing anything like that because we didn’t want to tamper with the genuine look of it,” he says.

### BULLISH ON THE FUTURE

Despite the well-known challenges facing the profession, Tony is still bullish looking forward.

“I think we’re in a good time for independent pharmacy,” he says, noting the way that pharmacists stepped up to the plate and showed their value by continuing to serve their patients and the public despite the stress

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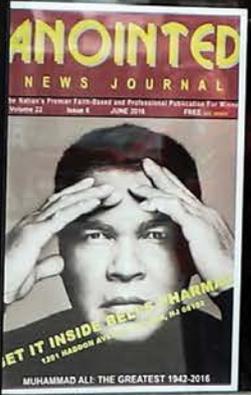
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STORE HOURS:  
MON - FRI 9am to 5:30pm  
SAT - 9am to 2pm  
SUNDAY CLOSED  
For Emergency (888) 473-0980  
Pharmacist in Charge - Antonio V. Minniti

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1931



*Tony Minniti considered the renovation of Bell Pharmacy as a "labor of love."*



*“When you have the ability to acquire a practice that’s an institution within a neighborhood, and bring all of this new life to it, by building on all of those many years of trust in the community, it’s a fantastic opportunity.”*

**Fast Facts: Bell Pharmacy, Camden, N.J.**

**ESTABLISHED:** 1931

**MANAGEMENT:** Anthony Minniti and sister Marian Minniti Morton, owners (purchased pharmacy in 1997)

**PRODUCTS & SERVICES:** Includes standard retail prescriptions, OTC products, prescription refills and transfers, home delivery, Drugstore2Door delivery, LGBTQ concierge services, pet compounding, erectile dysfunction medication, medication adherence, medication synchronization, medication therapy management, pet prescriptions; and supplies for physicians’ offices.

**NCPA MEMBER SINCE:** 2016

and uncertainty created by a world health crisis unlike anything seen in more than 100 years.

Tony continues promoting independent pharmacy by encouraging pharmacists looking to own to find long-standing stores and maintaining their legacy, using Bell Pharmacy as an example.

“When you have the ability to acquire a practice that’s an institution within a neighborhood, and bring all of this new life to it, by building on all of those many years of trust in the community, it’s a fantastic opportunity,” he says.

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE**

Tony sees Bell Pharmacy as a bridge between eras, recalling a time when pharmacies such as his were common in seemingly every neighborhood.

“Our mission is to see that this connection between past, present and future endures,” he says. “We should be embracing the past and our history because people really view that fondly. We can be old school and be cutting edge at the same time, which we are. I think that’s where the future of independent pharmacy is.

Tony also wants Bell Pharmacy to be a destination location.

“There are precious few places left where a great grandparent can visit ‘their’ place with their grandchildren and great grandchildren to show them the way it was; where they can enjoy the same experience in 2022 as they did so many years ago,” he says. “That’s what makes Bell Pharmacy special and that’s what we hope to have accomplished through our restoration and stewardship of ‘Camden’s Pharmacy.’” ■

Chris Linville is America’s Pharmacist® managing editor.