

The 'Chancy Way'

Meet NCPA 2022-23 president and all-around nice guy Hugh Chancy

by Jayne Cannon

There's a quote, attributed to baseball's Leo Durocher, that says "nice guys finish last."

It's clear that Leo the Lip never met Hugh Chancy.

Chancy is living proof that the late comedian Garry Shandling's comment is closer to the mark: "Nice guys finish first," Shandling once said. "If you don't know that, then you don't know where the finish line is."

For Chancy, the finish line is the NCPA presidency. He got there when he was installed as NCPA president at the NCPA Annual Convention in Kansas City in October. Chancy, 57, comes to the office with 34 years of experience as a pharmacist and businessman, owner of multiple locations (five retail pharmacies, one closed-door pharmacy), a leader in state and national pharmacy organizations, and maybe – just maybe – the nicest guy in Hahira, Ga.



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Away from the pharmacy, Hugh enjoys the outdoors with his two dogs Remy and Charlie.

SMALL TOWN ROOTS

To understand who Hugh Chancy is, you need to understand Hahira. First, it's pronounced Hay-HIGH – rah. If you think of Atlanta when someone mentions Georgia, think again. The two cities are connected by Interstate 75 but separated by 213 miles. And nearly half a million people live in Atlanta, while Hahira's population is just over 2,700. Small-town Hahira suits Chancy just fine, but it wasn't always that way.

Chancy grew up in Hahira, where his father owned the pharmacy. Hugh worked for his dad as a bicycle delivery boy, but pharmacy was not his goal. He admired his father's best friend, who was a physician, and that's the career he wanted to pursue. A few courses into pre-med studies at the University of Georgia, he changed his mind and decided to become a pharmacist. But there was no way he was returning to Hahira.

While at the University of Georgia pharmacy school, a fellow pharmacy student named Tina Whitaker caught his eye. They had a class together and he was impressed by her intelligence and personality. But both of them were seeing other people at that time, so a friendship grew. Eventually, the situation changed, and Hugh asked Tina for a date.

At the time, Hugh says, he wasn't looking for love. "I was pretty focused on the path I had chosen," he says. "I didn't want to get distracted." That said, he was as surprised as anyone else when he told a friend just before that first date that Tina was "the type of girl I'd like to marry." And on that first date, she impressed him even more.

They got a bite to eat and when it came time to pay, Tina insisted on paying her way. "She said, 'you're in graduate school like I am,' and she paid for her dinner. That said a lot about who she was. She was looking to make her own way." What Hugh saw was a woman who was independent, career-focused, intelligent, and thoughtful.

Tina saw a young man on the way up. "He was ambitious," she says. "We had classes together. He was on time, very put together. He sat in the front of the class. He was very serious, but at the same time, he was very social. I just thought he was impressive."

Everybody liked him. "He was friendly," she says. "I could tell he was from a small town." Brian Caswell, NCPA president from 2019-2021, describes him this way: "When I think of Hugh Chancy, I think of the epitome of the southern gentleman."

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STEPPING FORWARD

Hugh and Tina graduated from the University of Georgia School of Pharmacy in the spring of 1988, took their boards over the summer and were married on Oct. 22, 1988.

Tina had also grown up in a small town and while the newlyweds and newly minted pharmacists weren't looking for bright lights and a big city, they wanted to make their way away from home. “We were looking for a chain that would have both of us,” Hugh says, and they found that in Columbus, Ga., a city on the Chattahoochee River in western Georgia. They were settling into their new life, but everything changed over Easter weekend in 1989. The couple went to visit Hugh's parents over the holiday, and on Good Friday, Hubert Chancy turned to his son and said, “Have you ever thought about coming back?” It was, as they say, a lightbulb moment.

The elder Chancy was in his early 50s; his son, 30 years younger. Hubert and his wife Sue had opened the pharmacy in 1966. In that moment, Hugh realized that his father was looking toward retirement, his brother was pursuing a business track in college, not pharmacy; and that if Chancy Drugs was going to continue, it was time for him to step forward.

Hugh also realized that he has become a bit disgruntled with his job. He worked for a small chain that had changed ownership and he was realizing that their ways weren't lining up with his values. “They wanted to separate me from the patients,” he says. “That's not who I was.”

So, he talked to Tina, and within days, the couple moved to Hahira. And they've never looked back.

Tina worked in hospital pharmacy when they moved to Hahira. But Hugh had plans for growing the business and he told her that one day, he would want her to come to Chancy's. They had two sons, Patrick and Austin, and in 1995, Tina came aboard as an on-the-bench pharmacist. Friends often ask how the two of them have managed to

work together so well for so long. “Well, the truth is we barely see each other during the day,” Tina says. They try to not bring work problems home, but sometimes, it can't be helped. “If we do talk about work, he's always understanding,” she says.

THE CHANCY WAY

Understanding. Empathy. Caring. Those are hallmarks of the Chancy Way.


The ‘secret weapon’ independent pharmacies have is relationships,” says NCPA CEO Douglas Hoey, who has worked closely with Hugh for years. “Anonymous chain drugstores and mail order pharmacies also sell prescriptions but given a choice, people choose independents because of a relationship between the pharmacist and their pharmacy team. Hugh really embodies that emphasis on relationships — with his community, with his employees, with his colleagues around Georgia and the entire country. He has an ‘EQ’ like no one I have ever worked with before. And, importantly, Hugh ‘walks the talk.’ He's always open to new ideas that make his businesses stronger and trying them out in his pharmacy.”

The EQ Hoey refers to is the “emotional quotient,” how people use their emotions in positive ways to connect, communicate and defuse conflict. Hugh has an innate ability to do that, Hoey says.

Amy Barrett, Hugh's executive assistant, agrees. “Hugh is an absolutely amazing guy to work for,” she says. “From day one he has treated me like family, and with family meaning so much to him that says a lot. He has such a strong passion for the community and pharmacy. At the end of the day all that matters is that our customers are taken care of the ‘Chancy Way.’ Hugh is the same person day in and day out.”

Chancy, his friend Brian Caswell, notes, treats his pharmacies “like a spoiled child, always giving and looking to see how he can improve upon it each and every day.”



A full-length portrait of a man standing on a paved path in a wooded area. He is wearing a red polo shirt with thin white horizontal stripes, blue jeans, a brown leather belt, and brown leather loafers. He has his left hand in his pocket and is smiling at the camera. The background consists of tall, thin trees with some autumn-colored foliage. The ground is covered with fallen leaves and pine needles.

Hugh has long been involved in local, regional, and national civic and professional affairs, serving as president of South Georgia Pharmacy Association, president of the Georgia Pharmacy Association, the executive committee of the Academy of Independent Pharmacy, and on the boards for Mirixa and Prescribe Wellness.

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CIVIC MINDED

When Hugh came back to Hahira, he plunged into local, regional, and national civic and professional affairs. Right away, he got involved with the South Georgia Pharmacy Association, serving as president from 1990 to 1992. He was president of the Georgia Pharmacy Association from 2005 to 2006, on the executive committee of the Academy of Independent Pharmacy and served on boards for Mirixa and Prescribe Wellness. He has a life beyond pharmacy, too. He's active in his church, Hahira United Methodist; sits on the board for Citizens Community Bank and was comprehensive campaign chair for his beloved alma mater, the University of Georgia.

Hugh entered the NCPA leadership pipeline about 15 years ago. Along the way, he forged strong professional relationships with colleagues that eventually turned into deep friendships. “I remember when I entered into leadership with Bill Osborn, Michelle Belcher, and Hugh,” Caswell says. “It was like we had been friends forever, though we barely had even talked before. The four of us bonded quickly and that friendship has flourished over the last 15 years. We grew close enough to bounce ideas off each other and test theories on certain subjects and even disagree vehemently, although always maintaining respect and friendship. It takes special people to be able to do that.”

BUILDING LIFELONG FRIENDSHIPS

For the past few years, this leadership quartet has taken a special trip (with spouses) just after the NCPA Annual Convention. They don't talk pharmacy, Hugh says. “Well, we try not to,” he says with a laugh. “And we do pretty well. It's a just a trip with friends. Those friendships are one of the greatest gifts of my career.”

Recently, Hugh took time away from his family Thanksgiving celebration to call Caswell, whose mother had died two months earlier. “Hugh called me on Thanksgiving Day because he knew this was my first holiday without my mother. It touched my heart, and made me smile that someone knew how I felt, shared a good memory with me and placed a smile on my face, where grief once was set in. It made my day.”

At the pharmacy and at meetings, Hugh is the total professional, comfortable in a white coat or suit and tie. But away from work, you'll find him outdoors, playing golf, on the water or enjoying bird hunting with his dogs, Remy and Charlie.

Whatever he does, family, friends and faith are his priorities.

“Hugh Chancy is a man of many talents,” Caswell says, “But the greatest of his blessings is being there for his family and friends with a tight handshake and a solid hug, willing to help at any moment with the biggest heart imaginable.” ■

Jayne Cannon is NCPA director of communications.



HUGH'S FAVORITES

Movie: “Top Gun: Maverick”

TV show: “Yellowstone”

Inspirational quote: From the Bible, James 1:2-4 “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Meal: “A good filet, cooked medium; and a loaded baked potato.”