

Business Review

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The Weekly Newspaper for Gulf Coast Business Leaders

When Del Parrish started his career as a young pharmacist, he worked at K-mart.

That's where he says he learned the mistakes he vowed never to repeat. He rattles them off: Inadequate training on computers and insurance-claims processing, inaccessible pharmacists, long lines at the cash register and no delivery to homebound people. "The world wasn't meant to be like that," he says.

But maybe it was for Parrish, an entrepreneur who's always quick with a smile.

The 40-year-old Naples entrepreneur and his wife Renee have built Sunshine Pharmacy into a chain of retail pharmacies, wholesale distribution to long-term-care facilities and home medical equipment sales that takes advantage of the customer-service weaknesses of large retail drugstores. Sunshine reported \$25 million in revenues in 2008, up 25% from 2007.

Parrish has also deftly navigated government minefields, jumping into businesses such as home medical equipment where half the competition was wiped out because they didn't know how to navigate the complex world of Medicare or how to obtain the right accreditation.

Since Medicare's prescription-drug plan was implemented, it doesn't really matter which drugstore elderly people buy their medications from because everyone pays the same. "It takes price out of the picture," says Parrish. That gives Sunshine an edge over the competition because the locally owned company puts a premium on customer service, Parrish says.

The company hires people who greet customers with a smile, aiming to be the Starbucks or Panera Bread of pharmacies. "We can't teach friendliness," Parrish says, though he quips that he's tried unsuccessfully in the past.

Sunshine has a fleet of a dozen trucks that can deliver medications to people all over Collier County from seven locations for \$3 per order. Each truck is monitored remotely using a global-positioning device, creating the most ef-



The variety of industries represented among the top 500 Gulf Coast companies is enormous. But they all have one thing in common: They are successful. Read the stories of nine such companies inside.

Del Parrish has built SunShine Pharmacy to No. 226 on the Gulf Coast 500, experiencing 25% growth last year. Vanessa Rogers

ficient routes and ensuring the drivers don't goof off.

Besides home delivery, Sunshine also provides services such as filling special pillboxes that are divided by day and time so people don't get confused when they take multiple drugs. It also makes

custom medications, including creating compounds for exotic animals at the Naples Zoo.

Sunshine was among the first to create the one-price prescription plan three years ago, long before big-store rivals did the same. A 100-day supply of

Gulf Coast500

LEE-COLLIER PROFILES



Vanessa Rogers

Del Parrish has built Sunshine Pharmacy in Naples by targeting the customer-service weaknesses of bigger rivals. Revenues rose 25% last year.

Something to smile about

Del Parrish's pharmacy business is growing by avoiding the mistakes of his much bigger competitors, and staying ahead of the government's heavy hand in health care. Revenues rose 25% last year.

most prescription drugs is available for \$18, which has led to some elderly customers to stop paying for the Medicare drug-prescription plan because Sunshine's prices are lower.

Parrish leases space to the U.S. Postal Service inside his stores, which draw prospective customers who might not otherwise come to the pharmacy. "At Christmas time, it's out the door," Parrish says.

Parrish has invested heavily in technology, buying a \$300,000 prescription-filling robot that cuts down on labor and improves accuracy. He's also beefed up his internal computer systems so that insurance reimbursements are speedy and paperless.

Sunshine has expanded into other businesses, including delivering prescription drugs to 60 long-term-care facilities as far north as Ocala, representing about 3,000 beds. Today, the company's Sunshine Solutions division accounts for 20% of Sunshine's revenues.

To capture the long-term-care business, Sunshine provides free education and training for staff in those facilities. They can earn continuing-education credits for their certifications at no cost. And Annalise Smith, Sunshine Solutions' vice president of business development, says she gives more personal attention to these facilities than larger competitors. "I tell people: 'You're a big fish in a small pond,'" she says.

Home medical equipment is another area Sunshine is growing. Many competitors in that sector have abandoned the business because of Medicare cuts and more stringent accreditation. While reimbursements may not be as high as they once were, Parrish says servicing the equipment can be profitable.

Parrish is always looking ahead to future opportunities. He's planning to invest in more robotics, gain market share in the Tampa Bay area for the long-term-care business, plans to add another retail location in Naples and is exploring the possibility of opening clinics for simple procedures inside the stores. "In this small part of the world, we can make a difference," he says.

— Jean Gruss

Del Parrish, Sunshine Pharmacy: 'In this small part of the world, we can make a difference.'