

The Employment Journey

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Pharmacies are a major employer on PEI

by Heidi Riley

“Retail pharmacies on PEI employ about 860 people, from Tignish to Souris,” says **Rob MacLellan**, Owner and Pharmacist at **Sherwood Drug Mart** in Charlottetown. “That many jobs make a huge impact on the PEI economy. And the service we provide is essential. We are a very accessible healthcare provider. When people can’t get an answer from the hospital or their doctor, they often phone a pharmacy for information.”

Sherwood Drug Mart is the oldest family-run pharmacy on PEI. Rob’s father **Al MacLellan** opened the business in 1956. The store location has moved a few times over the years. In May 2009, a fire destroyed the building, and a temporary location close by was open for business just a day later. In January 2010, a newly-built store opened.

Valuing employees and the community

“After the fire, a lot of people from the community gave us donations of food and labour,” says Rob. “The night after the fire we probably had 60 people setting up shelves.”

“We had a lot of help from our staff. Some people worked around the clock. We worked hard to get the store open again because we felt a real responsibility to look after our customers the way we had for decades. It was a magic moment. It was the best of times and the worst of times.”

Staff

There are 49 staff working shifts that cover the pharmacy’s opening hours from 8:30 am to 9 pm, seven days a week.

Job titles include: **manager, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, bookkeeper, clerical staff, delivery people, cashiers, and cleaners.** They range in age from 17 to late 60s. About 80 percent of the staff is female.



Rob MacLellan, Pharmacist and Owner of Sherwood Drug Mart.

Turnover rates

“Most of our staff has been here for a long time,” says Rob. “Some have been here for over 30 years. There is some turnover for cashier positions, about four to five people per year. Since we moved to a bigger location, we have hired more staff.”

Skill requirements

“Training required depends on the position,” says Rob. “We look for good multi-taskers who can prioritize and always put customer service first. We like to have lots of full-time people, because they provide more continuity and know more about how the store is run. I want people who genuinely care about doing a good job, are mature, and know what needs to be done. Front-line people need to have the warmth and ability to deal with the public.”

Benefits

Sherwood Pharmacy offers its staff paid sick days and holidays, drug and health benefits, a dental plan, and an escalating number of vacation days based on years of service.

Hiring needs

Some new hiring is done around the end of April when part-time staff, who are mostly students, are looking for more hours.

At the end of August when students go back to school, there may be additional hiring to fill those positions.

“When we hire, we typically look through the applications on file. Sometimes we post job openings in newspapers, and word of mouth works too. Most hiring has to do with timing. If you happen to come in with a resumé when we need someone, you will be top of mind.”

“We choose new hires based on applicable experience. A strong recommendation from a previous employer is important, and we do check references. During the interview, we ask a lot of open-ended questions. The reasoning and logic used to approach the answer can be as important as the answer itself.”

“It’s important to get the right employee, and to make sure they are doing the job that is right for them. Some are good at details and clerical work, and some are better at dealing with people.”

Advancement opportunities

“One of our pharmacists started as a part-time cashier when she was 16. And one started as a delivery guy, got his education and moved up to pharmacist. I did that too.”

Rob spent a lot of time in the pharmacy while he was growing up. He was running sales through the cash register and delivering prescriptions on his bike by the time he was 10 years old. “Present staff is the first place we look when we fill positions.”

Positions more difficult to fill

“Sometimes pharmacists can be hard to find. The jobs that involve more responsibility are harder to fill because they require more experience and the ability to get along well with people.”

Innovations

“We have embraced technology in the last few years. We had the first automated blister packing machine on PEI, and we were the first in Canada to have a Parata Max®, an automated drug dispensing machine. That machine actually allowed us to improve service and spend more time on patient care. Since the fire, there has been an increase in business and we were able to hire more people.”

“New technology allows us more time to spend on the front line delivering customer service.”

For more information about **Sherwood Drug Mart**, call 628-8900.



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