

Thomas E. Menighan

Making A Difference Through Service

Whether Tom Menighan is serving one person or one million people, his passion for the practice of pharmacy echoes prominently throughout his distinguished and multi-dimensional career.

As the Executive Vice President and Chief Executive Officer of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), the national professional society of pharmacists, Menighan leads an organization that represents 62,000 members practicing in all areas including hospitals, community practice (both chain and independent), long-term care, academia, and industry. "If you've got a pharmacy background," Menighan affirms, "you've got a home at the APhA."

Menighan's own 'pharmacy background' started when he was quite young. In his hometown of Sistersville, West Virginia, he got a chemistry set in the fifth grade. He loved playing around with it and fondly recalls performing the experiments in the instruction book. He also had a friend whose dad was a chemical engineer and had a small laboratory in their garage.

"We did a lot of messing around with formulas and that was neat," he recalls. "It got me curious."

That curiosity led him to frequent trips to the local pharmacy in order to replenish the chemicals in the chemistry set for more experiments or to buy sulfur, charcoal and other supplies. When the pharmacy's ownership changed, the new owner, Jim Phillips, visited the bank where Menighan's father worked. He mentioned his son's interest in pharmacy and Phillips responded, "Well, send him up, I'll find something for him to do."

Menighan went to work at Phillips Pharmacy restocking the drawers with vials to put medicines in. Soon after he started working there,

the long-time janitor retired, so he took over that responsibility as well. "Because I participated in sports, it was better for me to go to work very early in the morning, before school. I did that until I went to college and even came back during the summers to help out."

The sports that Menighan was involved in were baseball, basketball and football, at which he excelled. He even received several scholarship offers.

"I knew that pharmacy would be an intense curriculum," Menighan confides. "For me, focus would be required and trying to play collegiate sports and carry that kind of program would be difficult. I decided against pursuing an athletic career and saved my money to pay my way through college." Menighan attended West Virginia University and graduated after completing two years of pre-pharmacy and three years in pharmacy school.

"I knew I wanted to start a pharmacy when I graduated but I didn't think beyond that. I thought that working for a chain was a good way to learn, so I figured I'd work at a chain pharmacy out of college and save as much as I could for starting my own business." When Menighan heard about the Medicine Shoppe, a relatively new franchise opportunity, he decided that would be his route to entrepreneurship.

After graduation, and with his brand new wife Jeannie, Menighan moved to Zanesville, OH, to accept a position at Thrift Drugs, an eastern regional chain based in Pittsburgh, which was a division of J.C. Penney. The chain included Treasury and later acquired Eckerd Drugs before being acquired by CVS. He worked in Zanesville for two years and was transferred to Danville, VA, as a store manager. After working in Danville for



two years, Menighan was transferred again, this time to Huntington, WV.

"Shortly after that transfer, I opened my Medicine Shoppe. By that time, my wife and I had saved enough money to pay the franchise fee and still have some money to start the pharmacy. So I made the flying leap to become an entrepreneur instead of taking the common path. That probably was one of the best decisions I ever made because that allowed me to begin to differentiate, to try some different things."

Around the time of the grand opening, Menighan learned his wife, Jeanie was pregnant, and then shortly learned she had a recurrence of an earlier ovarian tumor. This was an intense five-year period for them. In addition to the new baby, his wife was bedridden, struggling with chemotherapy and radiation, and they discovered a third tumor. "Those were challenging times," Menighan recalls, "but we always found a way to look at the positive in things."

Though it was a difficult and painful period and, in 2003, Jeanie passed away, the treatments (and Menighan's strong desire to help others) led to a new area of service for his business.

"Because of my wife's illness, she couldn't keep food down. She was being treated at Duke University in a program that allowed patients to return home with an intravenous feeding tube in their chest. As her caretaker, I learned how to do manage home infusion therapy and I thought, 'Maybe other people need this service, too.' I spoke with two other pharmacists, Frank McClendon and Harvey Barton, about offering this service for other patients and that's how the home infusion service was started. Both of them are still good friends and business partners today, 30 years later."

It was the infusion business that launched Menighan's 24-year relationship with the APhA. He first became involved as a speaker in 1984. "The home infusion practice that I started was very innovative in its time," Menighan shares. I gave a series of talks on home infusion all across the country for the APhA, teaching people how to start that kind of practice. In late 1986, I was recruited by a senior staff member who said, 'We're trying to build the organization and are looking for people who have your skills. Would you consider coming to work at APhA?'"

"Well, I did consider it and frankly, it seemed like a higher calling. It wasn't that I left my practice because I disliked it; I saw an opportunity

to extend the optimization of practice to other pharmacists, to help them do a better job in patient care and ultimately impact the lives of more patients. The fact that the association is involved in legislation and regulation to expand consumer access to pharmacist services can have a huge impact on millions of lives. And that's what associations do. I couldn't do that at my pharmacy. I could touch one life at a time. This was different."

With his breadth of experience in multiple sectors of pharmacy in the ensuing years, Menighan was perfectly suited in his capacity as the CEO and well prepared to meet the organization's primary objective of increasing and enhancing consumer access to pharmacist services.

Founded in 1852, the APhA is the oldest and largest pharmacy organization in the United States, although it's not the only one. "We've always seen our job as promoting patient health through access to pharmacists' services, and thus enhancing the profession broadly," explains Menighan.

"When I first met with my staff as the new CEO, I quoted from a book that had influenced me, *It's Your Ship* by Commander Michael Abrashoff, who had been given the worst ship in the Navy and he turned it into the best ship in the Navy. He did it by empowering his crew and listening to their suggestions and showing them that when they gave good suggestions he'd use them. He essentially told them 'It's your ship' and the most junior crew member knew that it was his ship, too."

"One of the best decisions I've ever made was the conscious choice not to make a lot of changes when I took this job and to utilize the talents of a lot of good people and empower them to do more."

This style of management has thus far shown excellent results for APhA. Despite the shift in the economy in 2008 during Menighan's first year as CEO, the organization has remained healthy. Even though tough decisions had to be made, staff was retained and APhA was able to take care of its staff and members. Menighan is proud of that fact, especially in the face of an economic downturn. He believes that all of the knocks and turns that he experienced in his own past life served him well during that uncertain time. "I'm blessed with a very good staff," Menighan is sure to point out.

Those past knocks and turns that Menighan has experienced also gave rise to his commitment to prioritizing his relationship with his family. If he could leave a legacy for them, it would be health and happiness. "I'm proudest of focusing on the health of our family. I've remarried, and I'm very proud of my kids, my daughter and my 15-year old nephew that we're now raising, who has gone through some serious health challenges of his own. I'm convinced that wealth is important, but it's just a by-product of living a good life. I want my family to be well provided for, but 'provided for' means having the tools to make it yourself, not just being given a bunch of money."

Commitment is the theme that threads through Menighan's work for the pharmacy profession through volunteer roles within the association. He served as president of APhA from 2001 to 2002 and was a member of the Board of Trustees from 1995 to 2003. Menighan has also been instrumental in developing several highly successful businesses, partnerships and initiatives in the pharmacy profession over the span of his career.

Because of this tremendous contribution, Menighan received two honorary degrees, one from his alma mater, West Virginia University, for positively impacting the health care industry in America and the other from the University of Charleston, WV, awarded in recognition of his entrepreneurial approach to the business of pharmacy and his career success in the pharmacy profession.

"My goal is to get to the point where not only are pharmacists a relevant player in healthcare, but that consumers are really using their medicines well and to their fullest benefit. We've got a lot of work to do, but I think staying on that path and moving that ball down the field is a big part of my legacy to the profession."

The advice that Menighan would give to any graduating student boils down to a message he received at his first lecture in pharmacy school. The dean told the class, "You are now entering a profession where you'll never have to worry about making a living, so worry about making a difference."

"That stuck with me," Menighan shares. "And that sums it up. It's not about making money. Even when I was building my business, it

was about impacting people's lives. Patient care was a wonderful way to spend my days."

"As the world evolves, the dispensing function of getting the right medicine to the right patient will increasingly be automated. We believe that there is a medication use crisis in this country and that people need more information in order to properly manage the medications they get from their doctors. Pharmacists teach people how to manage their medications, that's what APhA is about. And I am blessed and privileged to go to work every day in service to my profession. This is a dream job for me."

– By Gordon J. Bernhardt, CPA, PFS, CFP®, AIF®

About Gordon J. Bernhardt

President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).