



We are kicking off our official 40th birthday celebrations at Capital Chemist Group this month! We want to give our customers the stories behind the brand, the people and the community. We love what we do, and we want to share this with our customers, friends, and family. The family that is, the Capital Chemist Group. ??

We will kick things off with the story of where it all began, Gary Cairns and Roger Tall took the time to answer some questions, enjoy the read!

1. When was Capital Chemist officially formed and why/by who?

Wanniassa Pharmacy was the first of the group and opened its doors in 1978. It has been described as the birth of the Capital Chemist Group, as Roger Tall and Gary Cairns opened the store in partnership with two others.

2. How did Capital Chemist come together in the early years?

Gary and Roger came to Canberra in 1976, two country boys with a passion for pharmacy and business in the prime of their careers. Gary opened Kambah Pharmacy in 1976 while Roger was gaining experience from other pharmacies. Gary was invited into partnership by the then -current owners of Kambah which lead into his ownership in Wanniassa thereafter.

The expansion of Canberra was rapid at the time Gary and Roger came to town and started to build their pharmacy business and careers. The Public Service was expanding significantly and both Roger and Gary saw the opportunity in Canberra and specifically, Canberra pharmacy, "we made Canberra our home".

Roger graduated from the University of Tasmania and Gary from the University of New Zealand. In 1971 Gary moved to Griffith from New Zealand, then to Canberra in 1976. Both Roger and Gary were country lads with a good work ethic and country values. Both were very intuitive in following the opportunities they were presented over the years to do with the pharmacy business.



In the beginning, Kambah and Wanniasa were the first two suburbs and powerhouses of the Capital Chemist Group. A key mantra of the business that Gary and Roger employed to the way they ran their business, was to create opportunities for other young pharmacists to grow with the business promoting longevity for future generations.

Gary and Roger were passionate about growing their teams and giving young pharmacists opportunity, which was a key point of difference in comparison to bigger pharmacy groups in Canberra at the time. The concept of paying it forward is something still spoken about today in the head office of the Capital Chemist Group and executed in day to -day business. Young existing owners and incoming owners are encouraged to adopt the same philosophy and “don’t be greedy”. Gary and Roger as pharmacy business owners were unique in the way they went about their business. Communication was succinct and clear at both junior and senior levels and everyone was treated on equal terms.

Gary and Roger opened new pharmacies as the overall business expanded. They bought existing pharmacies as well as expansion was always in line with ‘newbies’ to be involved in the new business opportunities.

The growth has happened consistently over the years starting with 6 owners in 1984, to 60 owners today, 32 female and 28 male.

3. Did you ever imagine the group would grow to the size it is today?

Gary and Roger were passionate about the pharmacy business but equally as passionate about “having fun along the way”. They had a deep motivation to make the business viable and resilient.

Whilst today there’s an intention to grow the group, it’s not growth at any cost, it’s about finding the right people to run resilient and sustainable businesses, both new and existing.

Shop staff have been extremely loyal with a number of employees having been with the group for more than 30 years. There is an immense amount of loyalty within the company, now with over 600 employees in the group. With the support and guidance of



the senior management team and head office staff, the group continues to improve and expand.

The group employs a strong community focus, quality care and service across all areas of the business. Gary and Roger view themselves as Pharmacists and health care professionals first and business people second with a commitment to, "Doing the first bit right first and the rest will follow".

The Capital Chemist Group is one big family, everyone can rely on one -another and there are great relationships among the group. They actually have an internal list of items amongst stores named 'share'.

4. Who were the key contributors to the establishment of the group?

Peter Downing: "Gary and Roger had influence from older partners and embraced a philosophy of paying it forward, equality, engagement and equity of access".

Colin Trethowan was a pharmacy owner himself from the early days and acted as a mentor to Gary and Roger from the beginning. The Capital Chemist business model relies on the new owners coming on board to having their fair share, bringing the philosophy of 'paying it forward' for the next generation.

Gary and Roger followed on Colin's lead from the twilight of their careers and continue to pass on their knowledge, support and skills in pharmacy and business to the next generation.

5. What are the key organisations the Capital Chemist has supported over the years?

There are roughly 30 organisations that the Capital Chemist Group continue to be involved with. The Snowy Hydro Southcare Helicopter Service was their first major organisation. The Cancer Support Group (Rise Above), Convoy for Cancer, Menslink are all a major community focus and investment for the group. The group is also highly regarded with police force and schools in support of their programs.

Roger had the original idea of school scholarships, with the ACT education department and Universities, he is big on education. The group donates \$3000 to every ACT senior



college. The program has been a stand out success; the prizes go to disability/special schools as well. The group sees that education is a huge part of their community involvement. All Canberra stores contribute to the Capital Chemist Community program -this is part of being in the group.

Other focuses for the Community Program are health related, providing equipment for disability services, mental health services, neonatal services and local sporting organisations, especially junior sport. 2018 saw the appointment of Scott Reardon (Paralympian) as the group's Junior Sports Ambassador as they made sponsorship commitments to ACT football, netball, hockey, little athletics, basketball, nippers and other sporting organisations.

6. Where do you see the Capital Chemist Group in 40 years time?

We will continue to meet the daily challenges of both business and customer/patient care by retaining and gaining hands-on community pharmacists within the group focused on providing excellent care to our patients.

The Capital Chemist Group's key point of difference and one they wish to see continue as the core of the group focus is to truly improve the health of the communities in which we live and being genuine, committed "problem solving" community pharmacists.

7. What are the key areas of growth Canberra could expect of the Capital Chemist Group in the future?

We see our future in providing outcome-driven professional services across the group to better help community health and wellbeing.