



Arthur Metu of Capital City Pharmacy

Mister Metu's Neighborhood

FOUR YEARS AGO, ARTHUR METU OPENED VALLEJO'S CAPITAL CITY PHARMACY—THE FRIENDLIEST CORNER DRUGSTORE THIS SIDE OF 1950.

BY MEGAN MCCREA // PHOTOS BY CALI GODLEY

Ask Arthur Metu what he'd be doing if he weren't running Vallejo's Capital City Pharmacy, and he doesn't hesitate a moment: "I'd be a teacher."

The 61-year-old certainly looks the part, with black-framed glasses, a ready smile, and a crisp uniform—button-up shirt and tie, slacks, and loafers. He sounds it, too: His voice is friendly yet authoritative, a slightly lilting baritone hinting at his cosmopolitan roots.

And he's had practice. Since opening Capital City in January 2016, he has trained eight aspiring pharmacists, including those applying for their license. "I love hearing, 'I passed!'" he says with a laugh.

At a time when most pharmacies are run out of big chain stores, the independent Capital City offers a more personal touch—underscored by Metu's own story of finding his way to Vallejo.

Born in Nigeria, Metu attended high school in London before returning to his

native country to complete pharmacy school. He then moved to Oakland, where he received his pharmacy license for the state of California.

Working all over Northern California, Metu noticed that many of his clients were coming from Vallejo. Curious, he discovered that the city—home to three senior homes and a low-income housing complex—was severely "underserved," he says. "No place within walking distance to buy a Band-Aid or aspirin."

Inspired to help, Metu looked into launching his own pharmacy within the city limits. A history buff, he learned about Vallejo's past, including the fact that the city had served two brief stints as California's capital. "After reading that, I said, 'You know what? There's only one name befitting our pharmacy,'" he says.

Nine months later, Metu opened the doors at 339 Georgia Street, welcoming Capital City Pharmacy's first customers.

Since then, Metu has had ample opportunity to educate not just students but also his customers and patients. Under his tutelage, some of his regulars have made remarkable health gains: Patients with hypertension have been able to decrease their medication use, and some diabetic folks have gone off insulin entirely.

But where Metu is most impassioned is helping people to quit smoking. Since becoming a pharmacist, he's heard smokers trot out every excuse in the book. One of the most common? Stress.

For Metu, that explanation doesn't hold water. "When they say, 'Stress,' I say, 'Stress? Barack Obama quit smoking as president. Do you have more stress than the president of the United States?'"

Metu's tough love notwithstanding, it's clear that the community loves him back. Exhibit A: the COVID-19 screen. Back in March, with the pandemic raging, the pharmacist worried about protecting his customers and staff. He hoped to install a glass barrier at the cash register to limit potential exposure.

"I was telling a patient the challenge we were having and said I would call my contractor," explains Metu. "The next morning, he called me and said, 'Cancel that call to your contractor.'"

Later that day, the patient and his wife came over with the screen and installed it, charging nothing for the job.

Then there's the neighborhood

"[Vallejo was] underserved. No place within walking distance to buy a Band-Aid or aspirin."

—Arthur Metu

couple who bring fresh flowers to the shop nearly every Saturday. "They've been doing it for over two years now," Metu says. "They just like us being here."

But perhaps one of his favorite moments happened this summer. A

student who had worked at Capital City for more than a year was about to graduate and asked Metu to hood him. "I was supposed to be at his graduation," the pharmacist recalls, adding that the student was planning to move to Arizona soon after. "But because of COVID, that couldn't happen."

But a few days before leaving California, the new graduate stopped by the pharmacy "in his graduation outfit, and we took some pictures," Metu says. "He was one of the best I ever had." 339 Georgia St., Vallejo, capcitypharmacy.com •

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