



# TOMMY

LLAMAS, CATTLE,  
AND BEES — AND  
A 34-YEAR CAREER  
IN PHARMACY.  
**MEET GPhA'S  
NEW PRESIDENT.**

**BY PHILLIP RATLIFF**

**T**ommy Whitworth is on his Cub Cadet utility vehicle. He's dressed in a T-shirt and jeans, having doffed his lab coat several minutes before, and he's riding along the highway shoulder on his way to the quickie mart a mile up the road from his farm in LaGrange. Traffic whizzes by, but Tommy is unfazed. He steers the Cub Cadet deftly along the narrow stretch of grass, then veers left to cross the highway. Soon we're walking inside the store.

Tommy enters like he owns the place, opens the door to the employees-only walk-in cooler, and grabs a 24-pack of aluminum-bottle Miller Lite.

"They drink this at Talladega," he says.

Tommy sets his beer and three bags of pork rinds on the counter, lays down his money, and we're soon barreling up the driveway of his 40-acre farm. The expanse of acreage before us is a breathtaking sight, like TV eye candy: the Ponderosa or the opening credits

## profile

of Dallas, maybe. To our right is a copse of southern pine. Dotted the fence line are several small white boxes swarming with honeybees. To our left stand a half dozen cows, two Jerusalem donkeys and what must surely be a subject of LaGrange conversation, a family of llamas.

We pass Tommy's ranch house and head straight to what appears to be a garage a couple of hundred yards down the drive. It's Tommy's "man-cave" he says, outfitted with a bar, a beer cooler, as much Auburn Tigers memorabilia as wall space will allow, and a TV the size of a small movie screen blasting Tommy's beloved Atlanta Braves.

### THE GOOD LIFE

To Tommy, this is the good life — the fruits of 34 years of hard work. He's been an independent pharmacist owner, a hospital pharmacist, a community pharmacist in both retail chain and independent settings, and a compounding. Currently, he owns and runs his own compounding operation, CMC Pharmacy, located halfway between his farm and LaGrange's quaint town square, while working shifts at nearby Emory Clark Holder clinic as an oncology infusion pharmacist, doing sterile preps for chemotherapy patients.

But Tommy's embrace extends beyond the various practice areas of his field. He's a devoted to his daughter Megan and wife, Susan, a pharmacist with 33 years experience. He's an avid cattle farmer, specializing in high quality beef from Belted Galloway cows.

Being a cattleman and a pharmacist has allowed Tommy to combine his passions in a way he didn't see coming.

"I'm a pretty good makeshift veterinarian," he says. "I have a good relationship with our vet. At CMC, we do a lot of compounding with the veterinary clientele, have a good relationship with vets — and dentists, OB/GYNs, podiatrists, pain doctors, internal medicine — very broad compounding."

Medicine was integral to Whitworth's life from the start.

### A PHARMACY LINEAGE

He was born in LaGrange 1957, "to two of the most caring human beings to ever set foot on this earth," he says. His father, Jack Whitworth, a UGA and Medical College of Georgia graduate, ran a booming



medical practice in Greenville. Later, Jack went to work as the company doctor for a textile mill, West-point Pepperell, in Lanett, Ala. Jack was a humanitarian, rich in bedside manner and concern for his patients. But he was brilliantly analytical, Tommy says, conducting research on work conditions in textile mills that would eventually influence medical policies at other U.S. mills.

Tommy witnessed his father applying the rigors of science to a people-oriented sort of profession and so much liked what he saw that he may have gone to med school ... had a man named Frank Tigner not entered the scene. Frank Tigner, besides being Jack Whitworth's best friend and undergraduate roommate, had chosen a different path in the medical profession: pharmacy. After earning his B.S. at UGA, Frank moved to Greenville to work alongside Jack. Together, Jack and Frank became the little town's indefatigable medical team.

"They had a collaborative agreement. They practiced *together*," Tommy says. "I remember as a small child the respect Frank and my father had. They would go out together on house calls during flu seasons and work unbelievable hours. Frank had heard that you wouldn't have to work as hard if you're a pharmacist than if you're a doctor. But it didn't work out that way."

"He and Daddy came back to Greenville and practiced medicine and pharmacy together in some shape or form or fashion until each died. Frank is the reason I am in pharmacy today," Tommy says. When the family moved to Alabama as a teenager, Tommy's dream of UGA made a slight detour toward Auburn.

### TAKING CARE

It's daybreak on the Back 40 farm, and Tommy and I are in our respective cars, heading toward downtown LaGrange. We exit our vehicles at the town square and walk past a statue of the Marquis de Lafayette, the French aristocrat whose estate, La Grange, or "the farm," gave the town its name.

"I LEARNED FROM MY DAD AND FRANK THAT YOU LEAVE SOMETHING BETTER THAN YOU FOUND IT."

A small peloton of cyclists pass us and Tommy strikes up a conversation. One is a pharmacist himself, it turns out. We approach a glorious Georgian structure just off Lafayette Square and Tommy punches a code into a keypad. Soon we're inside First Baptist Church's nineteenth-century preaching hall. I wonder if Tommy is a deacon or volunteer of some sort, that he would have access.

"I'm a Baptist by faith, but I am also very ecumenical," Tommy says. To illustrate, Tommy rattles off the denominations he's a part of. "I teach Sunday School at the Baptist church and attend a Bible

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study at the local Methodist church,” he says. For the last several years, Tommy has served with an Episcopal Church-based medical mission team in Honduras, usually departing just a few days after GPhA’s annual convention.

It is all about loving people and taking care of them, he says, a habit of heart and mind he learned from watching Frank Tigner and his father serve Greenville patients.

“That is what Christ has us here for, to love your neighbor as yourself, treat them as you would want them to treat you,” he says.

We exit First Baptist Church in search of breakfast. Tommy knows the perfect spot, a diner just off the main square bustling mainly with men decade or so older than Tommy, huddled in groups of two and three discussing news while students from nearby LaGrange College bring them sausage and biscuits, gravy and eggs, grits and coffee. Tommy orders some of each and I ask for a bowl of oats and a banana. “There’s no fruit here,” the waitress tells me.

Meanwhile, Tommy has jumped into a conversation about church and politics with two 60-somethings. The men joke and back slap and trade stories. It’s obvious that Tommy is like a light bulb in a roomful of moths.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Tommy was installed at GPhA’s president on July 11. If you want a taste of what Tommy’s presidency will look like, envision him at that roundtop in LaGrange, surrounded by instant friends, telling tales, waxing philosophical about all the threads of his life, woven in a cord, binding him to the profession and to its people, envisioning his year much as he does his farm — as an expanse of opportunity.

“I learned from my dad and Frank that you leave something better than you found it. You put back more than you took out of it. You can’t complain unless you’re involved in the process of making it better.”

Tommy has a vision for his presidency: Making GPhA more responsive and more inclusive.

“We’re streamlining our board. We’ve got a great plan — our strategic plan — in place and we’re already working on that. And we’re going to be doing a lot more on the legislative side, because we’ve got to be even more ambitious there,” he says. “I’m excited.”

And he wants everyone on board. “Hospital, chain pharmacist, nursing home pharmacist, independent owner — we’ve all got the passion, and we need to harness that.” Tommy says. “We want everybody to have a place at the table.” [f](#)