



ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

WALGREENS BUYS, SHUTS THREE LOCAL DRUGSTORES



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Phyllis Weber tries to get the attention of Brett Williams, former owner of a pharmacy in University City that was sold to Walgreens and closed. "We call it Willies. ... We don't even call it Williams," said Weber. "This place is an institution."

Customers' prescription records are transferred to chain's database.

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Walgreens has acquired three St. Louis-area community pharmacies — shutting their doors at 9 p.m. Tuesday.

The retail giant has no plans to operate drugstores at the three locations, which were part of Williams Community Pharmacies. Instead, the electronic prescription records of customers who patronized these independent pharmacies have been transferred to the Walgreens database.

Customers did not receive any prior notice of the sale. Those who call the three pharmacies are being referred to nearby Walgreens locations.

A fourth pharmacy owned by the Williams group is not part of the Walgreens deal — and will continue to be operated independently.

Walgreens bought the Williams Pharmacy in University City, the Clarkson Square Pharmacy in Chesterfield, and Prescription Plus at 5 Maryland Plaza in the Central West End. The dollar amount of the purchases has not been disclosed.

"It was quite a shock, not only to me but also their employees," said David Kammer, owner of MD Pharmacy, a community pharmacy near Interstate 170 and Delmar Boulevard in University City. "We're still going — and offering the same type of personalized service that only an independent pharmacy can offer."



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Cameron Oar, a pharmacy technician at Ladue Pharmacy, part of the Williams Community Pharmacies, talks to a customer on the telephone Wednesday. The Ladue Pharmacy was not sold and remains open.

Walgreens' latest acquisitions are occurring as independent, family-owned pharmacies are struggling to stay in business. Squeezed by insurance companies, online pharmacies, large drugstore chains and grocery markets, many neighborhood pharmacies in the St. Louis area have closed.

Pharmacies large and small also have been pressured further by mail-order

operations. Insurers and pharmacy benefit managers have tried to move customers with chronic conditions to mail order.

The three sold pharmacies were owned by Brett Williams. He also had a partner in the Clarkson Square drugstore: pharmacist Stan Martka.

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