

# Sooner Nation

## Victor Law excels in pharmacy and friendships

**T**he road to success for 1976 OU alumnus Victor Law ran straight between the goalposts of Owen Field.

"I'd started watching American football when I first came to the United States," says Law, a native of Hong Kong, "I saw OU play Nebraska in 1971's 'Game of the Century,' and I was so impressed with the wishbone offense I said, 'I want to go to that school so I can watch a football game each weekend.' I attended every home game and would skip class to watch practice."

Even with missing a class or two, Law excelled in OU's rigorous pharmacy program. He was among the first Asian graduates of the OU College of Pharmacy and the first Chinese-American presented the college's Outstanding Alumni Award. He also served as president of the OU Chinese Student Association and made countless connections.

"The people at OU were so friendly, it was unbelievable," he says.

When each spring semester ended, Law was on the road to New York City, where he stayed with friends and waited tables.

"I'd drive 39 hours—I was so poor that I couldn't afford a Motel 6 room, which was like \$6.99 at the time," Law laughs. "But I could work for three months and make all the money I needed for a whole year at OU."

He graduated with honors and took an internship in California. Law studied for that state's pharmacy board exam, considered among the nation's toughest, and was shocked to learn people routinely retook the exam several times. "To tell you honestly, the quality of education at OU was so good that I passed it on the first try," he says.

Throughout the next decade, Law worked for two national pharmacy chains. The outgoing personality that served him so well at OU fueled his professional growth.

"In the beginning, I didn't know anyone, so I joined the California Pharmacists Association," he says. Law rose to lead the association's local and state chapters. He also evolved into a dedicated community volunteer, earning the American Pharmacists Association Foundation Bowl of Hygeia Award for civic leadership in California.

"My customers are my friends," says Law, adding that he meets customers wherever he goes. "Owning a community pharmacy is such a gratifying experience."

Along the way, Law became a valued advocate. He helped organize a political action fund lobbying for the pharmacy profession on the local, state and national levels. Former California Gov. Edmund G. Brown appointed Law to the California State Board of Pharmacy in 2012; six years later, he became the first Chinese president of the board in five decades. He was named California's Pharmacist of the Year in 2017.

Around that time, Law began to see a growing vulnerability in independent community pharmacies like his that have been a mainstay of American life for centuries. With national pharmacy chains cropping up on street corners faster than Johnson grass, he believed that the survival of smaller mom-and-pop drugstores could be at risk.

Law leveraged his experience, education and knack for making friends into the creation of an independent pharmacy network believed to be the first of its kind in the nation. He is now CEO and president of Alpha Plus Network Inc., or APNI, a group of more than 130 independent California pharmacies. The nearly three-year-old network allows pharmacies to partner with independent physicians, negotiate collectively with wholesalers and other vendors, and develop medical outreach programs for patients.

"Victor collaborates outside of pharmacy," says APNI Chief Operating Officer Ethan Huynh, who witnessed Law's



Victor Law (second from left) came to the University of Oklahoma after falling in love with Sooner football on television. The California pharmacist took nearly 20 family and friends with him to see the Sooners compete at the 2018 Rose Bowl.



One of the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy's first Asian graduates, Victor Law has gone on to win multiple awards and is innovating an independent pharmacy network that holds promise for the survival of mom-and-pop drugstores.

activism long before working with him.

"He talks to physicians, health administrators, to everyone who is involved, because the 'pharmacy problem' is a piece of the puzzle in how our entire health system is built," adds Huynh. "Victor is a change driver because he's able to talk to people across the table."

David Fong volunteers as APNI's vice president of network operations. He's known Law for 25 years and says his friend's secret weapon is a broad base of contacts.

"U.S. Congress members will call Victor and ask, 'What do you think about this bill? How does it affect patients and pharmacists?'"

Fong recalls an occasion when California's legislature planned to slash pharmacy reimbursements as a budget-cutting measure. Law explained how that action would devastate businesses and helped legislators find a better solution.

"Independent California pharmacies were able to stay in business because of that, and the majority of them didn't know Victor was involved," Fong says.

National trends lean toward vertical medical integration, adds Fong, in which insurance companies require patients to use specific hospitals, doctors and pharmacies within one network.

"I wanted to start something new," says Law. "As just one person, there's only so much you can do, but as a group, we can do much more."

The San Gabriel Valley, where Law owns three stores, is known as one of the nation's fastest-growing areas for Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. APNI recruits pharmacists fluent in Asian languages to work with local doctors, better serving vulnerable and often elderly populations.

Law's patient-centered approach has earned him an armload of community and professional awards.

"Victor has a keen sense of making sure the community has a voice," says Huynh. "I think a lot of people pursue titles as building their resume. But Victor saw that there are generations who will come after him."

Law says that sense of community has very clear beginnings on a campus more than 1,000 miles away.

"An OU education not only helped me professionally, but it also created a very good culture for me," he says. "You don't see that kind of cooperation and friendship at other schools. It's a very precious thing that I learned at OU."

*Anne Barajas Harp is associate editor of Sooner Magazine.*