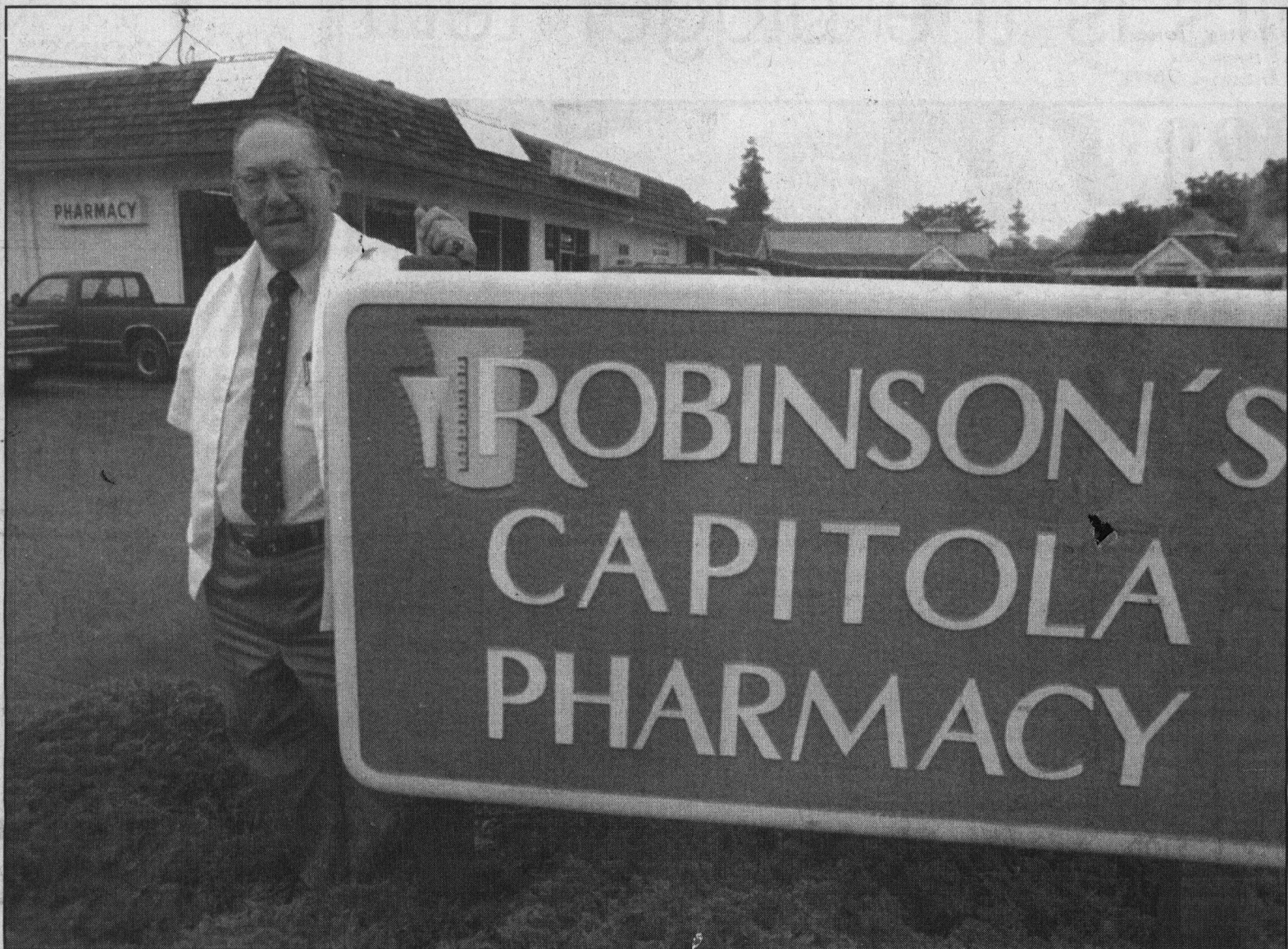


# The 'doc' is out



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Managed health care, with its predetermined payments, has made it tough for Howard Robinson to turn a profit.

## Capitola pharmacist easing into retirement

By ERIN K. QUIRK  
Sentinel staff writer

CAPITOLA — Locals are calling it the end of an era as their "country doctor" tips his hat and shuffles off down the road.

Howard Robinson, owner of Robinson's Capitola Pharmacy, retired last month after 20 years of service in the shopping center next to Gayle's Bakery. The building is for lease and Robinson is easing into semi-retirement.

"Even if you didn't feel good, you always felt better when you left (Robinson's) because he was just so kind," said Sue Porter, a Capitola resident and customer for more than 20 years.

Robinson, who now works part-time with Long's Drugs in the Nob Hill Shopping Center, said his decision to close the store came partly at the hands of a few active grandchildren and his love of duck hunting. But the demise of the independent pharmacy, known for nose-shaped tissue boxes and in-depth medical consultations, Robinson said, can be blamed solely on a phenomenon known as managed care.

"I'm sad about closing my business but you get to the point where it doesn't pay to be in business any longer — there's no bottom line," he said.

### The community 'doc'

Robinson opened his first pharmacy in the early '60s with 405 square feet in the entrance of DISCO which is now Nob Hill. He sold the pharmacy in 1968 and bought it back in 1974.

On Jan. 2, 1975 he opened up Robinson's Capitola Pharmacy in the old Texaco station at the corner of Bay and Capitola Avenues.

"Where the lube rack was, that's where the vitamins are," he said.

Robinson credited himself with introducing competitive prescription pricing to the county and leading the way in ostomy products for customers with bladder and colon problems. Many customers spoke of consulting Robinson when they couldn't afford doctors and of his dedication to making insurance companies pay for drugs considered "alternative."

Other customers, like Gayle Ortiz, owner of neighboring Gayle's Bakery said it was his knowledge and compassion that she will miss the most.

"This guy was like a doctor in so many ways," Ortiz said. "He had an overall wisdom on so many health issues."

### Tough times for independents

Robinson said because of the current trends in the health-care industry the margin of profit on prescriptions is very small. His is just one of many independent pharmacies going out of business.

"We receive a fee for service based on what the insurance will pay," Robinson said. "In most cases I can't capture a profit."

Furthermore, he pays the pharmaceutical companies for the drugs in 15 days, but he said, many insurance companies won't reimburse him for 4-10 weeks.

Mail-order medicines are another thorn in the side of the independent pharmacy, Robin-

son said. One of the largest pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors in the country runs a mail-order business that directly competes with independent pharmacies.

"A lot of people were very angry and felt like I let them down in some way," Robinson said. "Managed care has let us all down."

### Don't blame the chains

In the wake of the battle over the proposed Bay Avenue development, many people have held Robinson up as the poster-child for the chain vs. independent argument.

"This is an example of what the super store movement is doing to the community," said Bruce Daniels co-founder of WAVE, the citizens group working to preserve the village environment.

Robinson said he sold his client list to Long's Drugs but he said neither Long's nor other drugstore chains contributed to his decision to close.

"A lot of people are saying chains were a detriment to my business. They were not," he said. "Managed care has done it to me and a lot of other pharmacies."

Robinson said he will miss his customers, but has seen several of them at Long's since he moved. He said he will work a limited schedule there and spend more time with his two grandchildren, on his boat and at his duck club.

"I'll miss the number of friendly people and taking care of their needs," he said. "I've enjoyed doing business in a very nice community."