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DETAILS

Leslie Escobar
Staff

Greenfield Pharmacy is located at 333 El Camino Real, **Greenfield**.

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Robot reduces pharmacy wait

B LESLIE ESCOBAR

The Salinas Californian

It's not as cute or personable as R2D2 or C3PO, the endearing robots of the "Star Wars" films.

But the robot behind the counter of the **Greenfield** Pharmacy in **Greenfield** is considerably easing the job of John McElmoyl, the pharmacy's owner.

The robot, which fills prescriptions, is able to count 25 tablets a second, and have the prescription ready to go, organized by the patient's last name, in 20 seconds.

The process, McElmoyl said, used to take an average of a minute or two per prescription when humans performed it.

The **Greenfield** Pharmacy robot has been dubbed "Robbie."

"We kind of just settled on Robbie, but that's such a cliché and another pharmacy had the same name," McElmoyl said. "We haven't put a lot of deep thought into it, but it works extremely well and extremely fast."

The pharmacy bought the robot, also known as the **Parata** Robotic Dispensing System, in May.

So far **Parata** Systems, a North Carolina-based business, has installed 149 robots throughout the United States and Canada, and hopes to have 1,500 in operation by the end of the year, according to company statements.

The machines cost about \$187,000 each.

Parata pharmacist Pete Klein said he believes the robots, which take up about as much space as two refrigerators, are becoming a necessity in pharmacies everywhere.

"It's just like computer systems that are required in pharmacies now to process insurance claims and prevent potential drug interactions," he said. "Robots can add a lot of value to any pharmacy."

Parata Systems was launched a little over three years ago, but Klein said many companies have been using robots to dispense medicines for about 15 years, particularly mail-order pharmacies.

"The trend is definitely pointing toward automation in pharmacies," he said.

"There's a lot of excitement," Klein said. "It's finally answering a need that's out there - easy to use and very reliable."

That robotic reliability, McElmoyl said, is something his customers are counting on.

"I only have a few people that have experienced a great interest in looking at it, but they sure like it when their prescriptions are back in 30 seconds," he said. "I get out from behind the counter now and I'm able to really yak it up with the patients."

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RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Pharmacist John McElmoyl checks the control screen Tuesday of the **Parata** robotic prescription system at **Greenfield** Pharmacy. The pharmacy recently started using the system to fill prescriptions. It contains 252 cells to hold prescription drugs and can fill a prescription in about 20 seconds.

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