



## STAYING PUT

### Tony Calandro Returns to Hot Springs for Rewarding Work

STORY and PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATE OLSON

*Tony Calandro has come full circle. He's racked up thousands of frequent flyer miles and hotel points in his career. But he's going to finish his career in his home state or at least his adoptive home state.*

*Calandro, the chief executive officer of Healthy Connections lives in Hot Springs - the city he moved to from St. Louis when he was in the seventh grade.*

*After he graduated from the University of Arkansas at Monticello, he left the state forging a career in sales and eventually became an executive. His travels in his health care sales career took him back to St. Louis where he was born and eventually to Milwaukee, Dallas and Chicago. He went from selling equipment to another organization where he spent time "fixing" companies that had been acquired. He eventually became a CEO of a family-owned company in Dallas which specialized in back-office scheduling software and operations. Calandro grew*

*the company from several Texas locations to multiple locations in several different states.*

*He moved back to Hot Springs in 2010 to take the helm of Healthy Connections. Calandro has helped expand the nonprofits' organization and services. He's found working for the federally qualified community health center rewarding after spending decades working for private and public for-profit companies.*

*"In the FQHC world, you are working for and serving those people that really need help," Calandro said. "That is why we all do what we do."*

*Recently, we sat down with Calandro in his Hot Springs office to discuss how his early experience helps him now, how he has balanced a career and a family of five, his future and more.*

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**Q : What did you think about Healthy Connections when you took the job?**

**A :** I interviewed with the board of directors and thought it was an outstanding opportunity. As far as I could tell the company was in its infancy stages. When I started, we had two operations. One clinic in Mena and one in Mount Ida. We have a great board of directors, and always have. The board had one request, "Do what you need to do to make Healthy Connections a long term sustainable company."

**Q : How did all of your sales experience help you to get to being a health care executive?**

**A :** I think it all stems back to the basics. As my original mentor always told me, you have to not only understand the equipment, but also the service side of our industry. I think that was the implementation for me. That was the well-rounding I needed to observe from all angles. It made a big impact. But once I delved into it, I started recognizing that there were commonalities amongst all businesses. It wasn't just a one-dimensional. It all relates to one another. I experienced a lot in the turnarounds. You learn to take the hand that you have been dealt and how can you can take that and work in the confines of what you have. Sometimes it is personnel but, sometimes it is adding other services or deleting services. Sometimes, it is adding people. It is a variety of things and it all takes balance.

**Q : How did Healthy Connections compare to some of your other opportunities and roles?**

**A :** Healthy Connections was a good, functioning opportunity with a supportive board of directors. They provide a great service. Our staff does an outstanding job with the patients we serve. The staff is incredible. The foundation was already here, and all we had to do was to build upon our structure. There wasn't anything wrong with the organization, it was about guiding the mission. You take people and put them in the best position to make them successful. That has been our motto since I began. The key is to give everyone the tools and resources they need to be successful.

**Q : Healthy Connections has expanded to include a cardiology. How did that happen?**

**A :** We did some pre-planning with the board of directors on patient needs outside of primary care and how we could provide those services. Cardiology was one of the single-largest referrals for our patients. Expanding into cardiology dovetailed with our existing service lines and provided a benefit to our patients.

**Q : Healthy Connections now has two divisions, a non-profit arm and for-profit arm. How has that helped the company?**

**A :** It has allowed us to be a little more flexible in looking for and examining opportunities. Operating as a federally qualified health center, you not only operate as a non-profit but deal with additional constraints. Those constraints are challenging but at the same time you are trying to sustain an organization, you have to look elsewhere for other revenue streams and opportunities that will allow you to grow. This has allowed us to be very flexible when reviewing new opportunities and how they affect our business and work to our advantage.

**Q : How do you balance the two divisions?**

**A :** There are no gray areas. They are two distinct, separate companies and organizations. They operate independently. They each have a separate board of directors and separate operating agreements. They are each driven by an entirely different mission and set of goals.

**Q : You were nominated as the Non-profit of the Year at the Arkansas Business of the Year banquet earlier this year. How satisfying was that?**

**A :** We were honored to be considered and to be in the company of some great organizations. We were nominated along with some significant organizations, such as the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, Arkansas Arts Center, EAST Initiative and Junior Achievement of Arkansas. It was great for Healthy Connections to be included as it was a direct reflection on the hard work of our employees. It's not about me or any one individual, it is about the performance of the entire staff. Our mission is to improve the health and well-being of the communities we serve.

**Q : You got your law degree and MBA from Valparaiso University when you lived in Northwest Indiana**

**outside of Chicago. How do you use your law degree at Healthy Connections?**

**A :** I didn't go to law school to work for a law firm. I wanted to use it to be able to continue to help folks, so it works well with what I do for Healthy Connections. The law degree has been a significant benefit when dealing with business contracting and negotiating some of our agreements.

**Q : You are 60, are you thinking about the end of your career?**

**A :** I still have a lot of miles left on my tread. I plan on giving all I can to Healthy Connections.

**Q : What motivates you to work as hard as you do?**

**A :** To bring more services to the communities that we serve. We are always looking for opportunities to add more clinics and more services. That's why I am up until midnight sending emails and back up at 4:30 a.m.. Most of that is self-imposed, I am always reading and learning, just trying to become better. I am always looking at new avenues and opportunities to pursue.

**Q : Has it been difficult to be there for your family during your career?**

**A :** When you have kids, a family, you are always trying to divide your time between your priorities at work and priorities of family. I am not going to tell you it doesn't come with its challenges, but I have learned over the years, I guess maturity does that for you, that sometimes things have to wait. Especially, when it comes to your kids and your family. I will work later at night or over the weekends so I can attend my daughter's band concert or go to a football game and watch her perform or attend any special events for my other children. It's a challenge, and balance is the key.

**Q : Is it fun for you to be back in Hot Springs?**

**A :** It is a blast. The goal was to move back to Hot Springs or Arkansas, period. It's fortunate I was able to move back to Hot Springs. This is like coming back home, like a lot of other people have done. This is an area and surroundings that I am comfortable with. My youngest daughter gets to attend school where I went to school. I knew my wife and I could acclimate, but I worried about my daughter, but she did extremely well. I have no regrets.