



Chris Robins  
joined Char-Broil  
as CEO in 2014.

# 'Life is Good Here'

*Char-Broil CEO finds Columbus a great fit.*

BY DOUG GILLETT • PHOTOS BY MIKE CULPEPPER

From Ziploc bags to Glade Plug-Ins to Sonicare toothbrushes, every household in Columbus probably has a brand name Christine Robins has headed up. Now the city has Robins herself: For the past two and a half years, she's been the CEO of grillmaker Char-Broil.

Given that Robins' career has taken her to such major cities as Seattle, Pittsburgh and Amsterdam, Columbus might seem like an unusual stop to make. But after nearly three decades as a corporate

executive, Robins decided it was time for her and her family to find a place where they could put down some roots. And it didn't take long for Columbus to move to the top of their list.

"When I started the interviewing process, I had a few other opportunities that I was looking at, and they were in different places—southern California, Boston, Minneapolis," she says. "My husband was the one looking at schools and communities and housing markets,

and every day for three weeks I'd come home and he'd have one more sound bite about Columbus. 'Did you know Columbus has such-and-such' and 'Here's what I heard about Columbus.'

"So I said, 'I'm really starting to think you're leaning toward Columbus.' And I have to say, it's panned out even better than we'd thought."

### *An Eye for New Opportunities*

Robins and her husband Dave are northerners by birth—she was raised in Green Bay, Wis., while he hails from Brantford, Ontario. She acquired nearly all of her work experience in upper latitudes as well: 17 years as a brand manager at S.C. Johnson & Son in the Milwaukee area; nearly five years as an upper-level executive at Philips Oral Healthcare, first in Seattle, then in the Netherlands; five years as president and CEO at BodyMedia, a wearable-tech startup based in Pittsburgh.

Once Robins had achieved the investors' goal of getting BodyMedia sold to a larger corporation, she started looking around for where her next opportunity might lie. "I wasn't really in a big hurry, I think," she says. "I'd moved my family several times in the course of 10 years, our kids were middle-school-aged at the time, so we wanted to find someplace that had longevity for us as a family. But a recruiter found me, and I think what intrigued me about this opportunity was it had the best of what I had liked at other companies: I really loved the privately held, family-ownership aspect and the long-term

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**“The global perspective at Char-Broil is terrific—there’s a huge market in Europe that, for us, is untapped. It’s a tremendous opportunity for us to grow our business and expand globally.”**

*-Chris Robins*

perspective you can take at a business like this one. The global perspective at Char-Broil is terrific—there’s a huge market in Europe that, for us, is untapped. It’s a tremendous opportunity for us to grow our business and expand globally.”

W.C. Bradley Co., which owns Char-Broil, sensed Robins would be a good fit for them, too. “She has a very strong marketing, product development and business growth background, which was really something we were looking for,” says Marc Olivié, W.C. Bradley’s president and CEO. “She also was very up to date and very active in new media,



Chris Robins chats with 19-year employee Kennith Josey about Char-Broil’s recent award. The company was named Lowes Innovation Vendor of the Year in the seasonal product category for its gas to coal grill.

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especially in attracting new consumers such as millennials. And I have to say that in the time she's been with us, her background has certainly proven to be outstanding for the growth and development of the business."

### *Breaking Boundaries, Quietly*

According to Olivie, Robins' talents have helped her achieve success quickly in an industry that has been particularly male-dominated.

"It's traditionally been the male who grills outside in the backyard," he says, "but there's a whole new generation of women who are interested in it. I think she knows how to go after that segment of our potential customers, and I think that helps her in really broadening the appeal that we want to bring out."

For her part, Robins says she's felt "very welcomed, very accepted," by both her team and the community. "I think other people think about [gender] more than I do," she explains. "I do remember when they sent out the press release announcing my hire, and the headline in the paper was first woman to run a

W.C. Bradley company in more than 100 years. Marc called me, apologizing, but I said, 'Don't worry about it.' I live for the day when they talk about your merits in getting the job rather than the fact you're a woman. That should be immaterial. It should be that you're the best person for the job, period."

Though Robins has received invitations for numerous speaking engagements and panel discussions focusing on being a woman in business, she seems much more energized talking

about career lessons that she finds universally applicable. Last year, she did just that in front of an audience of Columbus State University business students, and the experience still resonates.

"I have nine or 10 thoughts that I like to leave with people about how to manage their careers," she says. "I didn't realize the impact I had on that audience until later—over the next two or three months after that, I'd run into people at restaurants with my family or at the grocery store, and they'd say,

'Ms. Robins, I really enjoyed your talk at CSU.' Someone who was in the audience that day now works in our credit department, and she said, 'You really inspired me—as soon as I saw the opening at Char-Broil, I knew I had to try for it.'"

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*-Marc Olivie*

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## Chris Robins' Career Lessons

- > Build skill and experiences, not titles or power.
- > Learn, learn, learn.
- > Never assume you know what you like or will be good at.
- > Own your own personal development.
- > Be open to feedback and be sure it is balanced.
- > Balance personal and professional life—if not every day, over time.
- > Take risks and be okay with failure.
- > Be yourself and let your personality shine.
- > Enjoy the ride!

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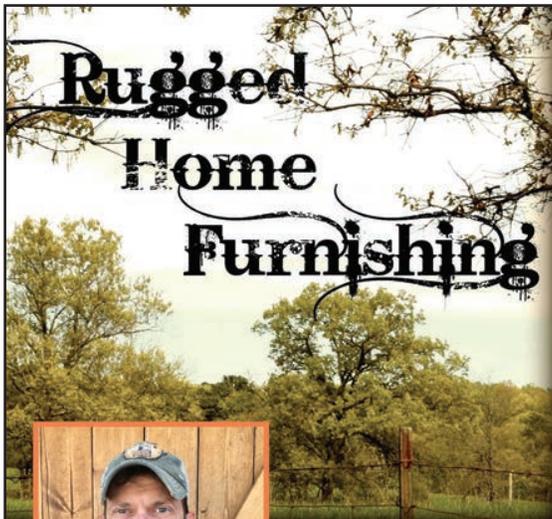


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BEFORE AFTER



*'Life is Good Here, Isn't It?'*

For Robins, the fact that such encounters have been so common also drives home the close-knit nature of the Columbus area. "It's been a really good move both personally and professionally," she says. "We love that it's a small town, but there are still lots of things to offer. My husband and kids were talking about it last year, and my kids said, 'Mom, this is the best house, the best city and neighborhood, and the best school we've ever been in.'"

Robins shows no inclination to argue with them. She and her husband sent Garrett, now a high-school sophomore, and Kayla, an eighth-grader, to St. Anne-Pacelli Catholic School because they "really liked the diversity, both ethnically and financially. That's something that was really important for us, for our kids to be in that kind of environment. To get that kind of an option in a town this size was a very nice surprise."

The Robins family doesn't appear to be missing much about the previous places they've lived. Even the summer weather hasn't fazed them. "July and August don't bother us because the trade-off is that we can be outside all year round," she says.

A moment from this past January, she continues, really sums up for her how fortunate her entire family feels to be in the Chattahoochee Valley. "My son and I had season tickets to the Springer, and we were going to see *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We had tickets for the Sunday matinee, so we parked right in front of the Springer, had lunch, went and got a coffee downtown, and then we walked into the theatre.

"He looked at me and he said, 'Mom, life is good here, isn't it?' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'In Pittsburgh it would've taken us 45 minutes to get downtown, we would've had to pay to park, and we still would've had to walk eight blocks.' But we had this great day, beautiful sunshine, it was easy to park, and we had a great lunch. For a 14-year-old to get that sort of difference, it says a lot." ☺