

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dee Robinson

PERSON

Robinson, Dee, 1961-

Alternative Names: Dee Robinson;

Life Dates: January 21, 1961-

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Work: Chicago, Illinois

Occupations: Entrepreneur

Biographical Note

Entrepreneur Dee Robinson was born on January 21, 1961. She received her B.A. in economics from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and her M.B.A. degree in marketing and policy management from Northwestern University's J. L. Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1988. She also later completed the Dartmouth College Tuck School of Business Executive Education program in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Robinson worked in banking at Ameritrust and Northern Trust as a commercial loan officer, and served as associate product director for Johnson and Johnson Consumer Products Company, facilitating successful new product national launch campaigns. In 1989, she served as assistant account executive at the Leo Burnett Company managing accounts and strategies for new product introductions.

In 1993, Robinson founded Unity Square merchandising ethnic-inspired products through a strategic retail partnership with Sears. As chief executive officer, she also established RobinsonHill, Inc., a concessions management firm specializing in U.S. airports and other non-traditional locations. In 1998, she secured a Unity Square license and catalog deal with Sears, and purchased a Ben and Jerry's Super Premium Ice Cream and Yogurt franchise. In 2001, Robinson opened Unity Square at Sears on State Street, the Ben & Jerry's shop at Midway Airport, and the first tourist location Ben & Jerry's at Chicago's Navy Pier, in 2003. Robinson entered into a joint venture in 2006 with Hudson News at Chicago O'Hare International Airport, and OTG Management in 2007 with Cibo Wine & Bistro, Cibo Markets and Jet Rock Sports Bar at Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. along with Cibo Markets at Chicago O'Hare International in 2008. Robinson's RobinsonHill began Hudson News store operations, and opened Cheeburger Cheeburger at Cleveland Hopkins Airport in 2009. She later launched

UFood Grill, a second restaurant at Cleveland Hopkins Airport in 2010. Dee Robinson led the Areas USA-RobinsonHill team and secured exclusive rights to develop O'Hare Airport's Food & Beverage Terminal 5 concessions program in 2011. In 2012, the RobinsonHill Group acquired the first Pinkberry frozen dessert restaurant franchise; won the bid to operate Garrett's Popcorn Shop at Midway Airport, and launched Potbelly Sandwich Shop at Boston Logan International Airport. In 2013, Robinson's RobinsonHill Group celebrated twenty years in the retail and restaurant business.

Robinson has served as board director for Wintrust Bank, the Illinois Gaming Board; Meridian Healthcare Advisory Board, and Committee for Amazon HQ2.

Robinson has received numerous awards and recognitions including, Kellogg Graduate School of Business BMA Entrepreneur of the Year Alumni Award, Women's Leadership Exchange Compass Award, Chicago Defender Woman of Excellence Award, Top 100 under 50 Executive Leaders Award, Black MBA Magazine's Entrepreneur of the Year, Ben & Jerry's Award of Excellence, and Airport Revenue News Best of Award Nominations for Small Retailer and Food & Beverage Operator with Highest Regard for Customer Service, Best Small News & Gift Operator, Best Food & Beverage Brand Operator for UFood Grill, and Best Overall Small Food & Beverage Operator.

Dee Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on May 3, 2018.

Related Entries