



How a People-First Mentality Has Helped Pat Perkinson Propel Wild Birds Unlimited Forward

Wild Birds Unlimited

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Pat Perkinson, the chief operating officer for [Wild Birds Unlimited](#), has spent her entire professional career in retail.

She first fell in love with the trade working for a number of small companies along the east coast. Eventually, one of those companies asked her to move to Indianapolis for a promotion, and she took on a new role, first as district manager and later as the regional supervisor. It was there that—through her network—she was introduced to Jim Carpenter, the founder and CEO of [Wild Birds Unlimited](#). This was in 1995, and Wild Birds Unlimited was in a strong growth cycle. The growing franchise was in the process of expanding their support services, and they called on Perkinson's expertise to help make that happen.

"I knew nothing about bird seed, and I knew nothing about franchising. But there was something about the culture that was very alluring. What struck me most was how authentic Jim was. This was nearly 22 years ago, and at that point, even as CEO, he was very connected and in-tune with his franchisees—and he remains that way today," Perkinson said. "You can see this in the fact that he's named our headquarters a Franchise Support Center. That resonated with me—that's what I love to do. This was an opportunity to help others achieve their dreams."

Armed with 21 years of prior experience in retail, Perkinson officially began her career with the flourishing franchise in June of 1995 as director of retail operations. Then, in 2005, she was promoted to managing director of retail sales and later to vice president of retail sales in April of 2007. Today, she serves as the chief operating officer. In this role, she's responsible for integrating the key roles of retail operations, purchasing, information systems, digital marketing communications, marketing, human resources, nature education and business projects while simultaneously managing the day-to-day operations of the company to ensure the highest level of support to franchisees and increasing sales and profits.

For Perkinson, one of the most important aspects of this role is serving as a mentor for her team.

"I had a great mentor along the way who always told me to hire people who can take your job. I like to see people grow and develop, so I made sure I gave my team all of the resources they need to grow as leaders," Perkinson said. "Our team focuses on supporting our owners as they deliver an exceptional experience to their retail customers and to deliver and ensure an exceptional franchise ownership experience for our owners."

Having been with the brand for nearly 22 years, Perkinson has watched firsthand as Wild Birds Unlimited grew into the industry-leading 310-plus-unit brand that it is today. But even as the brand evolved, one very important aspect of Wild Birds Unlimited remained the same—their relationships with each and every owner remained as strong as ever before. Over the years, as changes inevitably occurred within the franchise system, Perkinson made it her priority to make sure they were in constant communication with franchisees along the way.

"Whenever we had new product overhaul, for example, we always brought our owners into the process. We wanted to make sure their voices and concerns were heard, and that they fully understand exactly why these changes are occurring and how it impacts them," Perkinson said. "That's something we'll never lose sight of, even as we grow larger. It's a sense of community that we foster, and it's so important to who we are as a brand."

That sentiment is especially important today as Wild Birds Unlimited's development nationwide shows no signs of slowing down. So far, the brand is already on track to sign 12 new franchise agreements by April of 2017—an important number that puts Wild Birds Unlimited one step closer to its end-of-year goal of awarding 20 new franchises. This impressive development comes after Wild Birds Unlimited saw its best year of franchise development in a decade—in 2016, the brand awarded 20 new stores, 10 of which are already open.

To support that growth, Perkinson's focus right now is on enhancing the technology supporting every Wild Birds Unlimited location. This includes advancing the brand's point-of-sale systems with the help of a newly-hired director of technology. The end goal, Perkinson said, is to take Wild Birds Unlimited's technology to the next level. This is just one of many ways Perkinson plans to make propel the brand forward in the months and years ahead. And it all starts with making sure the franchisees have everything they need to thrive.

"Supporting our owners drives me every single day. We're never finished improving our support services," Perkinson said. "We have to keep going to the next level of support—being complacent is your worst enemy. For me, it's about giving our franchisees what they need to achieve their goals. And to never lose the sense of community that Wild Birds Unlimited was founded on."