

# Detroit Zoo GM Robert Harris — A True Michigander!



***The Harris Family — united in their love of Michigan and sports!***



***Rob learns the inside story about working at the Detroit Zoo during a job shadowing experience.***

**T**he dictionary defines “native” as being born in a particular place or country. And that definition applies to Detroit Zoo General Manager Robert Harris. He was born in, raised in and now lives in the world’s traditional automotive center – Detroit, which certainly qualifies him as a “Detroit native and a true Michigander.” The only time Rob hasn’t lived in the Detroit metro area was when he attended college at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, but that was just 25 miles west of the Detroit airport.

Why should Rob want to leave Detroit or even the state of Michigan? It has the world’s longest fresh-water coastline (3,288 miles) as well as lakes that feel like oceans and miles and miles of cherry orchards. Plus, it has a wide array of sports teams. You see, Rob is a sports fanatic. He developed this fervor naturally. He played sports all through school and attended college on a baseball scholarship. He currently has season tickets to the Detroit Lions (a team that has never been to a Super Bowl) as well as the Detroit Tigers (a team that has won four World Series championships in its 116-year history). Also, his favorite movies reflect his passion. Rob likes one of the greatest sports movies of all times – *Bull Durham*. This 1988 romantic comedy depicts the players and fans of a minor league baseball team when a veteran catcher is brought in to teach a rookie pitcher about the game in preparation for reaching the Major Leagues. Other favorites include *Caddy Shack* and *Rocky I*.

While Rob loves to play sports as well as watch them, he also loves his family. He has been married 10 years to Gail, and they have three children: Maegan, 9, Kyle, 6, and Tyler, 4. The children take after their father. His sons play soccer and baseball, and his daughter competes in competitive cheer-leading. Rob attends most of their sporting events and competitions.

Rob describes his wife as the world’s best juggler! He said she’s a “super mom” and takes care of the home front while also working full-time as an assistant weld engineer in the automotive industry. Rob claims the smartest thing that he ever did was to marry his wife.

He’s particularly close to his younger brother, Jeff . . . so close that the brothers live next door to each other. Jeff and his wife, Marianne, have two daughters that are the same age as Rob’s daughter. And Jeff is also in the service industry, he works as a police inspector. He is also Woodhaven City Council

Member and Mayor Pro Tem in the city they both reside.

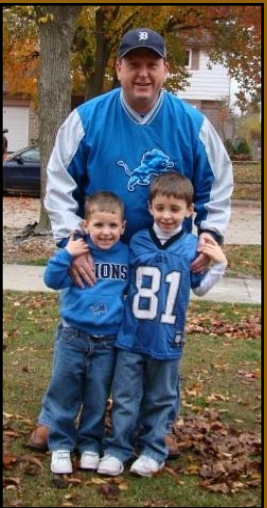
When Rob is not working, he enjoys spending time with his family. He looks forward to going home and joining the family at the backyard pool and firing up the grill to cook his favorite meal of grilled steak with mushrooms.

Rob believes life is sometimes so serious that you need to take time to laugh. He gets a lot of his laughs from watching the popular sit com, *Two and a Half Men*. Not surprising his favorite entertainers are comedians, such as Richard Pryor, Rodney Dangerfield and Steve Martin.

Rob's first paying job was delivering newspapers, and then while in high school a family friend hired him to sell cotton candy at a local amusement park. This same family friend later recruited him to a management job in the food service industry. Rob left college to take the job – much to his father's dismay as Rob only had eight credits remaining to earn his teaching degree. It shouldn't be a surprise that he wanted to be a high school coach.

You would think Rob's favorite magazine would be one devoted to sports, but it's not. He reads food magazines, such as *Bon Appétit* and *Savuer*. He laughing added that he does read his wife's *People* magazine. His favorite book is one of the top 15 inspirational business books of all times, *Swim with the Sharks without Being Eaten Alive* by Harvey Mackay. This book focuses on customer service and how to best work with people. Rob explained these choices by saying he reads for information, not for enjoyment.

Rob has been the General Manager at the Detroit Zoo for more than three years, and during this time he has used the skills he developed as an athlete and as an coach to become the number one coach at the zoo.



**Like father, like sons. Rob started early in wearing athletic logos on his clothes.**

### Seven little known facts about Rob:

1. Favorite toy as a child was probably a baseball.
2. Likes classic rock from the 70s and 80s, but usually drives to work listening to the Disney Channel, the station his children often listen to.
3. Enjoys playing golf, but there's never enough time to be good.
4. Wants to get his master's degree in restaurant management.
5. His dream job is to be a general manager of a Detroit sports team.
6. Wore a kilt at his wedding.
7. Wants to travel to Scotland with his family as his wife's parents immigrated from there.



**Rob married the love of his life while wearing a Scottish kilt — a salute to his wife's heritage.**