



IAAS Walks of Life 2011
Christopher Coburn

The Plain Dealer recently described Chris Coburn as “a pioneer in tech-based economic development, rugby lover and fifth-generation Clevelander.”

As executive director of Cleveland Clinic Innovations, Coburn leads a team focused on nurturing inventions emanating from several thousand scientists and doctors at the Clinic and guiding them through a years-long path to commercial viability. Their goal is to create products that can mend genes, extend lives and make old age more enjoyable.

Their efforts helped spin-off 35 medical technology companies that have received more than \$450 million in equity investment, transacted more than 250 technology licenses and received more than \$145 million in commercialization and applied research grants. Last year, Clinic Innovations generated \$37 million in income.

The technologies developed here spur economic growth for Northeast Ohio, already leading to more than 700 new jobs. Among them are two Irish biomed companies that decided to set up offices here to work with the Clinic. And as a result of the Clinic’s historic ties to Ireland, about 20% of that country’s cardiologists received training at Cleveland Clinic.

Coburn grew up in University Heights, the second-youngest among seven brothers and sisters in a traditional Irish-Catholic clan. His paternal grandmother’s brother was Bishop James McFadden, appointed in 1943 as the first bishop of Youngstown.

For college, Coburn walked to John Carroll University where he developed an interest in rugby while pursuing a bachelor’s degree in political science. After obtaining a master’s in public administration from George Washington University, Coburn landed a position in Gov. Richard Celeste’s Washington office. While there, he joined a rugby club, developing lifelong friendships with congressional aides and government officials who also were attracted to the sport. Coburn still enjoys the game, playing in a rugby tournament in Florida just a week shy of his 54th birthday.

He is a former vice president and general manager of Battelle Memorial Institute, a director of the U.S. Enrichment Corp. and author of the only comprehensive profile of public sector commercialization initiatives.

Coburn and his wife, Nancy, live in Shaker Heights. They have a son and two daughters.

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