

## **It takes a team**

Hard work goes into running the Lansing Lugnuts

by Will Lawrence

"There are times when I work 20 or 25 straight days without a day off," said Brad Tillery, radio broadcaster for the Lansing Lugnuts. "My off days are the team's off days."

Tillery's long hours bring the Lugnuts to thousands of radio listeners. He covers every inning of each home and away game, working 140 days out of a 152-day span during the season.

A strong workforce of people like Tillery is required to run the Lugnuts organization. According to Sponsorship and Marketing Director Valerie Claus, 15 full-time and several hundred game-day employees work mostly behind the scenes to keep the players, fans, and management happy.

"We have marketing, retail, box office, service, food, operations, and sales teams," said Claus, "and each team must do their job for the ballpark to run smoothly."

Included in the marketing team is the pit crew, which controls promotions that occur on the field in between innings. Crew member Mallory Curtis said that they are also responsible for filling the oversized shoes of Big Lug, the Lugnuts' adored mascot. On game day Big Lug can be seen doing the YMCA on the dugout, getting hugs from kids, and doing other mascot-like things. Curtis said that it can be a blessing and a curse to "be" Big Lug.

"We have one guy that's normally in the suit, but when he can't do it another one of us steps in," Curtis said. "Of course, nobody wants to be in the suit on a really hot day, but it's always fun to get attention from the kids."

Like the pit crew, venting also requires a large number of game-day workers. Oldsmobile Park sells the typical ballpark fare – sausages, soft pretzels, and beer – along with healthier options from the Sparrow® Health Food stand.

Most employees in the organization say they enjoy their jobs, but they agree that the worst part is the long hours.

"We get here at 8:30, and don't leave until 10:30 or 11:00," said Claus. "With those hours, anybody who didn't love it would quit."

In addition, the work for the full-timers doesn't stop when the players do.

"Sometimes the off-season is even busier than the season," said Claus. "We have to figure out who our fans are and what they're looking for."

Claus' marketing team takes polls to find out the demographics and interests of potential fans. This information is then used to develop successful promotions such as LAFCU® Fireworks Night and Molson® Thirsty Thursday.

All of the hard work by the Lugnuts' employees is successful when the players and fans feel at home in Oldsmobile Park. Mike Reynolds came to the ballpark recently with his wife and two young sons. As Reynolds and his wife watched the game, the kids felt comfortable enough to run around the park playing.

"We come to the games completely for the atmosphere," Reynolds said. "It's great to come down here with the kids."

Players agree that Olds Park is a great venue for baseball.

22-year old pitcher Kristian Bell said, "I love playing here in this nice park. I do wish it was the majors, though."

The major league dreams are not at all limited to the playing field. Broadcaster Tillery and Marketing Director Claus both said that they would love to work for a big-league team.

"Minor-league broadcasting is just like minor-league baseball," Tillery said. "We're trying to move up just like the players."