

pat ❖ Wunsch

grand slam



Pat Wunsch has been yelled at, spit on and called names at her job for the last 17 years. And she's loved every minute of it. As the executive director of the Fort Collins Baseball Club, Pat believes the positive aspects of her job far outweigh those few heated discussions with parents and coaches. The home run for her is watching kids have fun playing baseball. "I am very proud of what the baseball club is doing for the community and for the kids," she said. "We want these kids to love this game and play for life."

Pat and her team of full-time, part-time and seasonal employees coordinate the activities of 250 baseball teams that play more than 3,000 games over 11 months each year. The club offers programs for kids ranging in age from 5 to 18 playing on recreational, competitive, rookie league and intermediate teams.

Pat's journey began in 1990 when her husband Tim told her the Fort Collins Baseball Club was looking to hire an administrator. Because of her background in nonprofit administration, the job appealed to her. She applied and was hired as the executive director.

"I wasn't drawn to the job because of the sport," she said. "I was more drawn to the job because it was more in the service side of management."

Originally, she was told it would be a part-time, seasonal job, but it became apparent early on that this was a full-time position.

"I walked into a functioning (baseball) club," Pat said, "but not necessarily a fully functioning nonprofit administration."

It took a lot of legwork in the beginning to get the organization up and running as a nonprofit. With one person now going to bat for the organization, productivity improved and things started changing fast.

Mail-in registration was implemented, year-round programs were put in place, old fields were renovated and eventually, with the help of grant money, five new fields were added. Participation in the program has grown from 1,000 kids in 1990 to more than 3,000 today.

Pat is proud of having been able to invest in the city and help build and renovate fields and the program.

While the job was, and still is, full-time, it is not a typical 9-to-5 set-up. Some days, she works 16 hours, others only seven. Her children were 6 months and 12 years old when she first got the job. She says it's been a wonderful job for raising kids because of the flexibility. If she needs to sneak away to go to one of her son's baseball or football games, she can do that. She is just a Blackberry away if someone needs her.

Pat's son grew up watching her do her job and going to a lot of ball fields with her. He even got to meet Larry Walker during the dedication of the Larry Walker Field a few years back. Her daughter was older and actually worked for Pat occasionally.

The volunteer coaches are at the core of the Fort Collins Baseball Club. Pat beams with pride as she talks about this wonderful group of folks and the positive impact they have on the kids they work with. She believes they instill in the players not only the love of the game, but values that can be carried over into life, such as teamwork, camaraderie and coping with defeat and winning.

She explained that she comes across many who played ball growing up and because of their positive experiences are now coming back to coach their own kids' teams.

"It is a real testament to me about what the program itself is doing in Fort Collins," she said. "We are keeping people vested in our community and in the kids long term."

It is not only the coaches who are dedicated to the kids in Fort Collins, but Pat as well. She is on-call seven days a week and usually has no problem with that. There have been instances in the past though, when coaches or parents called her at home and were rude. Because of that, she doesn't answer her home phone anymore. At times it is difficult for her family, but for the most part, they understand.

Pat said none of the Fort Collins Baseball Club players has gone on to the pros. But her dedication to the program and the players shines through as she starts naming off high school players who she believes have what it takes to play baseball on an NCAA Division I college team.

The biggest challenge Pat faces in her job is Mother Nature. A rainy weekend can mean she and her staff have to reschedule 70 baseball games and deal with many phone calls and e-mails.

"When the weather is nice, people are happy," she said.

Most people think of seasons as winter, spring, summer and fall. Pat thinks of them more as basketball, hockey, baseball and football. She loves all sports, but gets really involved in the sport of the season. Over the years, she's had season tickets to the Rockies and Avalanche. She enjoys football and basketball, too, but when asked about her favorite professional team, she said doesn't really have one.

"I personally find the high school and collegiate sports a lot more enjoyable to watch than the professional sports," she explained. "When you get to collegiate sports, you can actually get more one-on-one. You can get near a bullpen and have the pitcher talk to you. You feel a little more involved in the actual games."

She said she enjoys watching the pros, but the bottom line is they are getting paid to do a job.

"You see much more love of the game at the high school and collegiate level," she said. "They are out there because they love doing what they are doing."

Pat loves being outside and she is not afraid of hard work. If she needs to mow a field, line a field, put down mulch, she'll get out and do it. *In fact, on high-stress days, she tells her staff she is off to a ball field.* She finds something productive to do and it relaxes her so she can go back to the office and better accomplish what needs to be done.

When Pat isn't working or at one of her son's games, you might just find her with a group of her scrapbooking buddies putting together an album. This group of ladies has been friends for years, getting together a couple times each month to crop, glue and archive all their kids' baseball and football pictures. Pat even makes scrapbooks for the Fort Collins Baseball Club.

"If I wasn't here tomorrow," she said, "I'd hope people would at least say that I really tried to do a good job to make their kid really have fun and enjoy what he was doing. That is really all it is about for me." ❖

