

## Just another flippin' day in the life of a Lion

Written by Jes-c Brandt

---



☐☐ Chris Gerk takes her turn at the grill in the Lions ballpark concession stand flipping those legendary burgers. Gerk is one of many volunteers who periodically spend a day of their lives as a ballpark burger flipper and concession stand worker.☐☐—Enterprise photo

Thirty minutes before the opening pitch, baseball players are warming up for their game and Lions Club members prepare to open the concession stand for business.

Countless Holyokites have enjoyed a tasty burger or a cold drink from the Lions concession stand, but few know what really goes into providing refreshments for the hundreds of hungry athletes and spectators at the Holyoke ballpark.

Let's take a look at what goes on behind the scenes during a day in the life of a ballpark burger flipper.

The typical Lion working in the concession stand has a full schedule besides volunteering at the ballpark, so a day in the stand might follow an already busy day at work. Once the Lions get to the game, they busy themselves preparing to open the stand.

## Just another flippin' day in the life of a Lion

Written by Jes-c Brandt

---

There's a relatively standard checklist to be completed before the Lions can begin sales, but even in that minor task, individuals add their own flair. Some open all the doors and windows while they work, allowing the flow of both outside air and conversation. Others prefer to complete their preparations before letting customers catch a glimpse of the inside of the stand.

Once they're ready to receive customers, a couple of volunteers will tackle the two-person job of opening the large front window. Finally, the rush of patrons begins. Even on what they would call a 'slow day,' hardly a moment passes without someone ordering at the window. There is a constant flow of candy, sunflower seeds, drinks, nachos, hot dogs, burgers and much more.

Here the volunteers' unique styles continue to be seen. Some prefer to work the window and others are most comfortable at the grill, but regardless of preference, they always manage to cover all the bases.

Working at the window means taking orders, remembering the prices of the many food items offered, collecting money, delivering the food and relaying grill orders to the back. It can be a demanding job, but it's also obvious that the window workers have the opportunity to meet some interesting individuals, and even watch some of the game—if business is ever slow enough.

At the grill is where the magic happens. Most never really see the grill, they simply come to the window and receive a delectable burger that seems to have materialized out of nowhere. For the men and women who work at the grill, the origins of the burgers aren't so mystical. They take their position at the grill, spatula in hand, and cook hot dogs and hamburgers by the dozen.

Now the question on everyone's mind: "How to they make those burgers so good?"

Unfortunately there doesn't appear to be a secret recipe—or at least not one they're willing to share. Caryl Harvey attributes the delicious burgers to their unhealthy nature, "They're so good because they're so bad for you."

Chris Gerk gives the credit to the grill itself. The same burgers cooked at home never taste as

## Just another flippin' day in the life of a Lion

Written by Jes-c Brandt

---

good as one cooked at the ballpark, Gerk said. Charlie Harvey says it's the quality burgers they order. Perhaps it's a perfect combination of all of the above.

The electric grill has a long history, the Lions tell. It's been used at the ballpark for years, and even before that, it was used by the Jaycees. Exactly how old the grill is seems to be a mystery, and they won't be letting it go anytime soon. Even with future plans to build a new concession stand, the Lions already know the grill is there to stay.

Outside a day of working in the concession stand, there is even more behind the scenes work required of the Lions. Charlie has the daunting duty to coordinate the schedule, making sure there are enough volunteers to run the stand, often stepping in himself when he is short on help. Especially in times like last week when there is a tournament, it can be hectic to keep up with changing schedules.

Food deliveries come in twice a week, so again, Charlie and Caryl find themselves at the stand, stocking the stand with the new shipment.

Volunteering at the Lions concession stand is so much more than simply exchanging food for money. Many of the Lions have been working in the stand for years. They have had the chance to chat and joke around with other volunteers, including a number of children and grandchildren who often help out. Over the years, a number of Boy Scouts have also worked behind the counter.

Charlie commented on how great it is to work with the youth back there. They offer an extra hand when the games are especially busy, but Charlie noted they also have an opportunity to develop a good work ethic there.

Kids on the other side of the counter also continue to leave an impression on the Lions. Volunteers have watched innumerable young children running to the counter with a foul ball in hand for that free lollipop. Those same kids often go from playing tee ball to high school ball and sometimes even on to umpiring and coaching. It's really neat to watch the players grow up, Charlie said.

## Just another flippin' day in the life of a Lion

Written by Jes-c Brandt

---

Concessions are open nearly year-round, with summer softball and baseball, men's league, and high school softball and baseball, and the Lions never know what they might see. Mary Tomky noted she's seen her share of strange orders come through the window. Some people like jalapeños on their burgers, and customers will put nacho cheese on everything from popcorn to burgers.

It's not unusual for a family to stop by the concession stand for a take-out dinner or for whole teams to come make an order for popsicles.

As a Lion enjoys a night at a ball game, he might find himself stepping behind the counter to help the volunteers get through a particularly busy rush. Sometimes even spectators who aren't a part of the Lions Club offer a helping hand when they're in a bind.

After a long shift, volunteers clean up, deal with leftovers and put everything away. Depending on the pace, the end of a night as a ballpark burger flipper usually wraps up around 10 p.m., but any volunteer can tell you that's not always the case.

Caryl laughed as she recalled one particular game that was cut short due to rain. The Lions had started the cleanup process early, when the opposing team knocked on the door. They wanted burgers, she said, but the grill had already been cleaned and turned off. The hungry guests said they were willing to wait, so Caryl invited them in out of the rain and grilled some burgers.

It's a combination of the routine and the extraordinary that make a day in the life of a ballpark burger flipper interesting.

Over the years some things have changed. The Lions concessions have switched from canned to fountain soft drinks, gum can no longer be sold and the popcorn machine has been replaced. But like the magical grill, the important things stay the same. The Lions continually provide quality service to the ballpark and always aim to give back to the community.