



RANDY LEWANDOWSKI

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By Rebecca Patrick

Randy Lewandowski has spent virtually his entire career with the Indianapolis Indians, increasingly contributing to making the team into one of Minor League Baseball’s (MiLB) most respected franchises. A Chicago native who grew up in Fort Wayne, Lewandowski joined the organization – currently the Triple-A affiliate of Major League Baseball’s Pittsburgh Pirates – as a ticket office intern in 1994 and worked his way to the top.

He became general manager in 2014, added the president title two years later, and in 2024 was named president and CEO. Today, he oversees business operations, fan experience and long-term strategy – helping keep the Indians among MiLB’s top draws while strengthening Victory Field’s reputation as a downtown landmark well beyond gameday.

Lewandowski was named MiLB’s executive of the year in 2024, an honor he views as an organization award for the “great, dedicated staff.”

An Anderson University graduate and four-year baseball starter, he brings a community-first approach to leading one of Indianapolis’ most visible institutions.

In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his wife, children and grandchildren, and loves nothing more than a peaceful boat ride on the lake.

BizVoice®: How do you think about Victory Field and the Indians as an economic engine? It’s really seen as a landmark, if you will.

Randy Lewandowski: “It’s Victory Field’s 30th anniversary. I think when the idea was hatched and thought about, (it was) that a

ballpark could help rebuild or revitalize downtown Indianapolis. It’s sort of in the middle of all of that. ... We’ve outlived the (Circle Centre) Mall. We’ve outlived Market Square Arena. We outlived the RCA Dome. Those were both torn down and moved on after 25 years or so. So if you think about it, Victory Field in general has worked – meaning we’ve been here; it has become that landmark. We’re well known not only throughout central Indiana, but also through the state because we host the high school state finals. It helps stretch us throughout the entire state, and it’s something that we’re proud of.

“With the advent of a 360-degree concourse, you can see the field from just about anywhere in the building. That experience makes the ballpark central to everything we do. We’re a minor league team in a major league market, and it’s more than about the game on the field. ... We like to consider Victory Field Indy’s biggest and best outdoor community gathering space. We treat it as such and want people to feel invited and welcomed when they walk through our gates.”

BV: One benefit of not being a major league team is there’s more affordability for fans ...

RL: “That is our niche in the market and it’s our mission, our vision: affordable family-friendly entertainment. It’s fun, it’s entertaining, and that’s what we’re all about. Then, we’re not reliant on wins and losses.

“So, we’re very intentional about maintaining the ballpark. ... As we’ve made additions over the years, we’ve (actually) reduced the seating capacity. When Victory Field first opened, it was 15,500. We’re now just under 14,000. But as we’ve added these premium and/or group spaces, when you walk in, you would not know that they weren’t part of the original design. So we’ve maintained the integrity of the building – those sight lines, the beauty, the comfort that the ballpark had originally.”

BV: Can you point to a ripple effect the Indians have had on the quality of place for the area?

RL: “You think back to when this was a gravel parking lot; West Street was a massive barrier. (We were) that first major stakeholder in this area. We opened up to the downtown skyline, but now we’re surrounded by the Elanco and One Health Innovation District that’s going to happen on the old GM stamping plant. We hope something happens at 11 Park and the old Diamond chain site. Those are areas that weren’t ever thought of being developed. So, I think we helped people realize you can cross West Street. The JW Marriott, that was not here; opened in 2012 for the Super Bowl. From a sense of place ... it’s another quality amenity that we provide in downtown Indianapolis.

“We play 75 home games where we average 7,500 to 8,000 fans per game. There’s a constant churn that we provide for downtown Indianapolis and the southwest quad as part of White River State Park. It just helps keeps the city moving and alive.”

BV: What are the specific markets you’re most focused on and which ones are you focused on growing?

RL: “Family sets us apart. ... This is no knock on anybody else in town, but when it comes to being able to (affordably) take out a family, we still have the lawn seating area where you can bring in your own food and beverage and you’re sitting on a blanket. Our Knot Hole Kids Club has been around for over 50 years. For less than \$25, (they’re) able to run the bases (after Sunday games) and come to every home game – and get a T-shirt and other giveaways. That’s a big part of what we do.

“Also, we have a strong niche in group hospitality. Again, it comes down to affordability, and we have the space to do group outings as small as 25, 50 or 100, but we can do 500, 1,000. Most importantly, we can also feed those masses through some of our large picnic areas.”

BV: What was it that brought you to the organization and convinced you this was going to be your long-term home?

RL: “It’s my 33rd season. It’s really the only place that I’ve worked. I would say when I first got started, there was excitement. It’s a lifestyle business, and you either embrace it or you don’t. I missed many friends’ weddings, lots of other family gatherings because back then we had a very small staff. If we had 70 to 75 home games, you were expected to work them all. For whatever reason, I thrived on that and still get excited when we open up the gates.

“With the advent of Victory Field, staff



Lewandowski, who was a young staffer when the team moved to Victory Field, now enjoys being the one pushed by younger colleagues with their ideas. “To tap into that youthful energy, it helps me stay young because I think back to how I was, and I was the one pushing. ... It keeps me engaged.”

doubled, lots of great opportunities, our business doubled – all those other avenues opened up for me and others on our staff. We were given great opportunities to grow and learn on the business side. I was a business management major at Anderson, and a lot of those things just fell into place.”

BV: Let’s talk about your ascension in the Indians organization ...

RL: “When you start out as an intern, you’re just doing the little things and trying to be seen and not heard, to work your way around and up and figure things out. But there were great mentors along the way who just continued to give me opportunities, and I was willing to take those on.

“I don’t know I would say I’m classically trained in any way, shape or form for leadership. I think it’s been from the School of Hard Knocks. By listening and learning and doing, sometimes you learn what to do and what not to do. (He credits the Indians’ executive patriarch Max Schumacher and especially the late Cal Burlison for mentoring him.)

“What holds some young folks back these days is that fear of saying ‘yes’ and the fear of the unknown. I just trusted in my ability to ask questions, figure things out and work my butt off – and try to make the best of things. That led me through different (roles), then figuring out a department and then leading more people.”

BV: Did you always want to get into sports in some way professionally?

RL: “It was from an early age. I probably learned my math with baseball box scores and reading baseball cards. That always helped

with my memory and my retention. I was pretty singularly focused on sports growing up. ... For a moment I thought about coaching and teaching when I graduated from college, because breaking in and getting your foot in that proverbial door, that’s the hardest part.”

BV: What’s something people might be surprised to learn about you?

RL: “Athletics was a big part of my life, but I never played hockey before, and I love hockey. I grew up a diehard Chicago Blackhawks fan. ... Me and my best buddy from college that I played baseball with got a hankering to go try to play hockey and we joined an adult men’s league. So, I like to tell people I’m a retired, washed up, below average, rec league hockey player. Most people find that pretty hard to believe because they associate me with baseball and don’t think baseball and hockey have much crossover.”

BV: If we were to talk in three to five years, what would you hope we’d be talking about?

RL: “(How) we’re going to continue to invest in Victory Field. There’s no better place for us to be in Indianapolis than at the corner of West and Maryland. And to use your term – to further that landmark status, how do we continue to do that? We need to continue to reinvent the experience in the ballpark and not just keep the status quo. ... In addition, how we can always give back to the community. That’s one of our core pillars, and that’s why we spawned Indianapolis Indians Charities (in 2019) to help support those charities, particularly around youth and family development.”

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