

BUSINESS PROFILE

The Red Sox spring training maestro

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Perhaps no one feels the Fort Myers presence of the 2007 World Series champs, the Boston Red Sox, like Director of Florida Operations Todd Stephenson. He coordinates spring training for the club at City of Palms Park with a casual flair, suggesting the apparent ease of an outfielder nabbing a routine pop-fly. But as one might expect, planning for about 130,000 spectators who will pass through the stadium gates each spring takes the whole year.

"September through April is pretty much petal to the metal," he said. "...To make sure that everyone has the resources they need for a smooth spring training, to get the Red Sox off to a good start."

Stephenson, 38, manages sponsorship, ticketing, Red Sox apparel distribution and sales, grounds care, and every last detail, such as the free sunscreen handed out to fans near the front gates. The hotdog carts inside the stadium are positioned to most expeditiously sell the goods - and that's because Stephenson makes sure of it during his morning check up of the grounds, trash bins, bathrooms, beer supply and all. And he is always on call to "put out fires."

"I'm the point person from entertaining the CVS sponsors of spring training, to paperclips," he said.

Stephenson seems to enjoy being at the center of the fun looking out. His wife Dawn and four-year-old son, Cale, (he also has a daughter, Kenidy, 7) had been among the fans at the game last Wednesday and

popped into Stephenson's office to say hello. He was sitting at his desk fielding cell-phone calls, while outside his open door you could hear the crowd intermittently cheering. Cale climbed into his father's lap, grinning, holding a Major League baseball he'd just signed his name on.

Stephenson explained why soon, he'll already be preparing for next year's arrival.

"The month of April we slow down and try to recap what we accomplished in March," he said. Then crews "summer-ize" the park, preparing for its yearly hibernation when the Red Sox go north, and so do many fans. In July and August, a sales campaign brings in partners like this year's sponsor, CVS, the drug store chain. And soon after, spring training arrives again.

"It could almost be considered a month long carnival," Stephenson said.

Stephenson has directed the club's spring training since 2003. Up until then, he worked for The Red Sox in a similar role, overseeing minor league teams in Sarasota. He doesn't often work with the players directly now, but knows some of them from their younger years as minor league up and comers - players such as relief pitchers John Papelbon and Jon Lester.

"They really don't change," he said.



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO EVAN WILLIAMS

Boston Red Sox Director of Florida Operations Todd Stephenson with his four-year-old son Cale.

"Now they're just a little more focused on their work."

Stephenson said the team this year is poised to go far.

"They look great," he said of the Red Sox as a whole. "Very professional and focused...After they won the championship it was a big party, they were still riding the wave."

That was in 2004, after the club won its first World Series in 86 years. Since then the excitement has leveled out.

"Barring any injury, the team should be very good this year," Stephenson said.

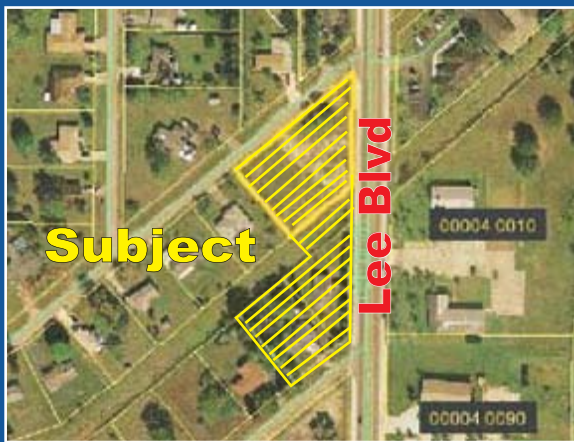
One day, he said, working for the club while living in Boston might become a possibility, but he isn't pushing for it.

"I'm very comfortable with where I am right now, professionally," he said. "A lot of times with the job people say, 'How's it going?' and I just describe it by telling them, 'I'm living the dream.'"

When he's not at City of Palms, Stephenson enjoys time with his family, golfing and fishing. Occasionally, he watches the Red Sox play.

"Some," he said. "Not as much as I'd like. I catch a few innings here or there." ■

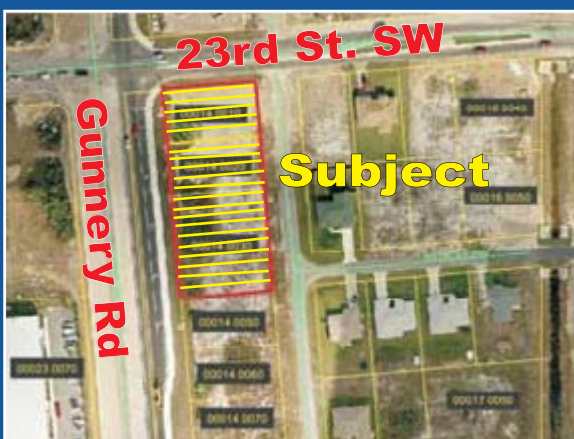
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