

At the Top of Their Game

Hospitality Management Alumni Score Big-League Roles in Sports Entertainment

By Diana Garcia

Hospitality management students are typically drawn to careers in hotels or restaurants, but job opportunities can be found in any business, including professional sports venues. Three Collins College alumni have found their niche in the booming sports entertainment industry, which is expected to generate \$73.5 billion by 2019. Here are snapshots of their experiences.



Dodger Stadium

For **MANOLO LICARDIE** ('15, Hospitality Management), one sport has been a lifelong passion.

"I am a baseball fanatic. Becoming a professional baseball player was always a dream, but the older I got, the more I realized that it wasn't going to happen. Then I fell in love with cooking and never looked back," Licardie says. "When I was at Cal Poly Pomona, I realized I may be able to do the two things I love most and cook for a MLB stadium."

Licardie is the culinary supervisor for Levy Restaurants at Dodger Stadium and is in charge of ensuring that all food is prepared and distributed on schedule, recipes are followed properly and portions are the same size. He oversees food safety standards and sanitation, visiting every concession during games.

"I never knew how big of a role hospitality played in a sporting event until working at Dodger Stadium," he says. "It's very similar to a restaurant or hotel in the sense that you are there to make sure your customer enjoys his or her time there and would come back."

Staples Center

During her senior year, **CLAUDIA CRUZ** ('13, hospitality management) was fresh out of class in her culinary attire when chef Ernie Briones ('92, hospitality management) encouraged her to check out The Collins College's Hospitality Career Fair. The event set her on her future career path.

Today, she is the manager of event suites for Levy Restaurants at the Staples Center.

She oversees 16 catering-style suites that accommodate anywhere from 12 to 150 people alongside 11 other supervisors, and she also manages staff schedules, day-of-event orders and any issues that arise.

The catering team oversees about 230 events each year at Staples and Microsoft Theater, sometimes three in one day, including all Clippers, Lakers and Kings games. Plus, the staff works concerts and special events, such as the Grammy Awards, Emmys, the eight sold-out Adele concerts this past summer and the 2017 NHL All-Star Weekend.

During the Grammys, for example, Cruz says they served 6,900 pieces of sushi, more than 800 pounds of New York strip loin and 1,200 bottles of wine.

"Working at the Staples Center is like working in a restaurant catering department, times 100," Cruz says. "Though some events can be small, others such as basketball games or the Grammys are huge."



Angel Stadium

According to **THOMAS MENDEZ** ('09, hospitality management), hospitality careers in sports have become a major part of the industry.

He is the director of concessions for LEGENDS at Angel Stadium of Anaheim and supervises all food and beverage service, analyzes financial data, and manages staffing, budget and guest satisfaction on a daily basis. He trains and certifies over 500 associates annually and is responsible for four managers with two layers of management to oversee all hourly staff during events.

"What I think is impressive is that on any given day, we serve high-end clients in a fine-dining restaurant and cater to season-long suite holders, as well as the players on the field in the clubhouse. Taking into account all of our demographics, volume on a day-to-day basis, and keeping in line with the team's nutritionist, we have our plates full every day.

"We hire about 200 to 400 people every year. There's about \$60,000 to \$80,000 of labor on any given day," Mendez adds. "People spend a lot of money in sports, and the food and beverage experience is a big part of it."

Dining at Angel Stadium is more than hot dogs, peanuts and a box of Cracker Jack. Mendez also manages high-end events with full-service catering and plated meals, with menus consisting of filet mignon, porterhouse steaks, pan-roasted salmon and more than 70 varietals of wine.

"A chef at a fine-dining restaurant can do all of these things. Did you know we have five-star chefs on board at Angel Stadium?"

Mendez says Cal Poly Pomona's learn-by-doing approach prepared him for his job, especially his training in The Collins College's professional cooking course and its restaurant operations series.

"I love that every day is different. I have the ability to be innovative in new menu items and concepts. The fact that my office is inside a baseball stadium is still a huge thrill for me that keeps me excited to come to work," he says. "My education prepared me to not be afraid or intimidated by my job in the real world."



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