

# MASCOT'S LIFE FILLED WITH LOVE, DANGER

Originally published in *The Blade* on Wednesday, November 6, 2002

By RYAN E. SMITH  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Some kids grow up wanting to be astronauts. Others have more down-to-earth ambitions - like being the San Diego Chicken.

I tip my hat to those, the lucky ones.

Future mascots must understand this, though: The noble life of a mascot is not easy.

I know from experience, having recently spent an afternoon filling in as Corny the Crow at a giant corn maze in Waterville.

First of all, being a crow is inherently dangerous - a group of them is called a murder. But think about a seven-foot-tall crow with a giant noggin. He, like all mascots, is a natural target for predators, especially roving packs of teens who try to behead him and steal his tail.

There is a tremendous upside, though. Corny - his full name is Cornelius - is very smooth with the ladies. In fact, everyone loves you when you're a mascot. You could call it animal attraction. Some kids want to hug you, others want you to shake a tail feather and dance the funky chicken. Some even stuff corn in your supersized mouth in an attempt to feed you. You flap your wings and pretend to fly, and no one thinks that you're strange.

It's not a job for just anyone. Most mascots get professional training. They sit in classrooms, attend practice sessions, and review video of other mascots.

I did not.

I was a novice mascot when I volunteered at the Fallen Timbers Community Church Corn Maze, a 24-acre maze carved into a corn field. I put on my black, furry outfit and giant head and jumped on the hayride. Then I played in the moon bounce and wandered around.

The problem with all of this was that I really couldn't see what I was doing. I could see people's feet through my gaping, toothless crow mouth, and their faces peered back at me through my giant, oval crow eyes. But the rest of them, well, there was this big beak of mine in the way. And so I stumbled around, doing my best to entertain the crowd.



Corny's duties include dancing with the kids (left) and even trying out the moonbounce (right).



It's not easy being a mascot, as Ryan Smith learned when he took over as Corny the Crow for a day.

There are rules about how to go about doing this. Some people call them "The 10 Mascot Commandments." Consider a couple of them:

\* NEVER try to pick up or hold children and other fragile objects.

Good advice, because if you do bend over to pick up a little kid, you might bonk him on the head with your beak and leave him stunned or on the verge of tears. Or, uh, so I have heard.

\* NEVER speak when in costume as it will ruin the fantasy that the mascot is a real creature, not just a person inside a costume. Use hand gestures and body language instead.

Bonus points if you have a background as a mime. Deductions, though, if that experience came in junior high school and you performed a routine to Milli Vanilli's song "Blame It on the Rain." (I took a deduction.)

\* NEVER give up your day job.

I added that one myself. As good as you might be, you still have to worry about things like the Anaheim Angels' Rally Monkey, which the team shows in video clips when it is losing. The thing is, it's not an oversized mascot; it's an actual 6-year-old capuchin monkey.

The monkey went 33-12 this season in games when the Angels trailed, including six times in the postseason, undoubtedly making it the World Series MVP (Most Valuable Primate).

How do you compete with that? I don't know. Maybe it's time to reconsider the astronaut thing.

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: [ryansmith@theblade.com](mailto:ryansmith@theblade.com) or 419-724-6103.

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)