



## Running a mill isn't run-of-the-mill

Windmill Island Gardens opens Saturday

By **STEVE RALPH**  
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 Posted Apr 15, 2010 @ 08:10 AM

Holland, MI — Helping brides plan their wedding receptions. Organizing grand historical reenactments. Booking corporate events. And, oh yeah, demonstrating an 18th century working windmill to hundreds of visitors and grinding 50- pound bags of wheat into whole-grain flour while she's at it.

It's all in a day's work for Alisa Crawford, America's only Dutch-certified miller and event coordinator at Windmill Island Gardens, 1 Lincoln Ave., downtown Holland, when she's not tending to her own line of Maiden's Pride bakery mixes, baking in her wood-fired stove at home or taking her 9-year-old son to the Cub Scouts Pinewood Derby.

"Operating the windmill is physically demanding," admits the dynamo of activity, who seems perpetually unruffled, centered and at peace with herself. "I do need to stock up on water and granola bars."

With the downtown Holland attraction opening for the season Saturday and Tulip Time just around the corner, Crawford and the park's staff are busier than ever these days.

"We're getting all of the buildings cleaned and ready. During the winter, we have fencing up all over the grounds to protect the tulip beds from the deer. All of that has to be taken down. All of that draped fabric that covers the pavilion we take down and is laundered every spring and it all has to be re-hung with the help of a lift," Crawford said.

The park's year-round staff includes just two full-time employees — Crawford and park Manager Ad van den Akker — and a part-time secretary. In the spring, a grounds and maintenance crew of about 15 is added, helping to get the place up to snuff for opening day, with the staff swelling to about 75 part-timers during Tulip Time and settling down to around 35 for the rest of the summer, van den Akker said. In addition, the park's gift shops are staffed by Dutch Village employees, Crawford said.

Crawford and van den Akker said the smooth running and continual improvement of the park is attributable not only to its hard-working staff, but also to key volunteers — many from the neighboring Freedom Village retirement community — who donate time and talent to the island's operation, including Dick Stafford, who assists Crawford with windmill maintenance, and Rob Zachman, who helps with grounds and landscape design. "Those two people carry a tremendous load. They're here pretty much every day, year-round. They do it out of a love of the uniqueness and beauty of Windmill Island," van den Akker said.

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