

## Panelists at 11<sup>th</sup> Jersey Shorecast Predict Strong 2019 Season at the Shore

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**Atlantic City, N.J.** – A strong economy, low unemployment, and diverse offerings should make 2019 a good summer for the Jersey Shore, a panel of experts said at the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Jersey Shorecast, sponsored by the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism at Stockton University on May 9 at the new Stockton Atlantic City Academic Center.

“There was more competition in Atlantic City in 2018 with two new casinos, but there was also more advertising and marketing which had a positive impact,” said Stockton University Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies Brian Tyrrell. “People have more disposable income, and that is good for this industry.”

Stockton Associate Professor of Economics Oliver Cooke said the leisure and hospitality industry accounted for most of the jobs created in the first quarter of 2019.

Industry professionals said they are diversifying the market to attract more millennials and create more activities for all visitors.

“People are not looking to just sit on the beach all day,” said Diane Wieland, director of the Cape May County Department of Tourism.

Wieland said ecotourism such as bird watching, and more activities like winery tours and cultural and historical activities, plus sporting events like the upcoming Escape the Cape Triathlon, help reach a larger and more diverse population likely to be willing to stay overnight and spend money.

Jim Zierys, vice president of Hotel Sales for Tropicana Atlantic City, said the popularity of esports and sports betting are bringing in younger visitors, and Stockton’s campus has also helped business with conferences and special events like graduation bringing in families to spend the night.

“There was so much excitement during March Madness,” Zierys said. “But some people come, and they never gamble, and that’s okay, too.”

He said any event, from beach concerts to an event at another casino property, can help everyone by drawing positive attention to the city.

Keynote speaker Mark Callazzo, CEO of Alpha Funding Solutions and a primary developer along Tennessee Avenue, said he wants to help create a new Atlantic City where people want to work, live and play. As owner of The Iron Room Restaurant, a co-owner of Tennessee Beer Hall, Callazzo is preparing to open a music venue, Rhythm and Spirits, this summer.

He said Millennials don't want to just stay in one place, they want to walk around, and bar hop, and he cited all of the businesses in the so-called "Orange Loop" (a reference to the streets that are coded orange in Monopoly - Tennessee Ave., New York Ave. and St. James Place) as working together to create a successful experience for visitors.

"We hope to draw people off the Boardwalk this summer," Callazzo said. "We are all working together to make this a go-to area to live, work and play."

Sandi Harvey, vice president of sales for Meet AC, said conference bookings are strong and they look to build on esports and the education market like Stockton to attract new events. She said the re-opening of the NJ Transit rail line between Atlantic City and Philadelphia is welcomed, even if it will be more limited.

"It's a huge selling point that you can get here from Philadelphia for \$10," she said.

She said so far Meet AC has booked 150,000 room nights for 2019, with an ambitious goal of 360,000.

"I'm confident we will achieve that," she said.

The panelists said a fifth weekend in August will also be helpful, but ultimately the summer is also always affected by something they can't control, the weather, and even pessimistic weather reports.

Mike Tidwell, director of sales and marketing at Seaview Dolce Hotel and Golf Club, said wedding business is strong but also faces competition from location and destination weddings. They are focusing on recruiting corporate events, and the golf courses are a big draw. He said more events are being booked online, so a good web presence and rapid response times are crucial.

Another challenge is a shrinking labor force. While a low unemployment is good, panelists said it can be challenging to fill all needed jobs in the peak season. Some 3,500 jobs were added in 2018 with the opening of Hard Rock Hotel Casino and Ocean Resort.

The new sales tax on short-term rentals is also expected to impact shore rentals. Wieland said she has heard people saying they may not rent because they don't want to deal with collecting and filing the tax forms, or they may just let a real estate agency handle their rentals instead of doing it themselves.

**PHOTO CAPTION: Jersey Shorecast panelists, from left, Jim Ziereis, vice president of Hotel Sales for Tropicana Atlantic City, Diane Wieland, director of the Cape May County Department of Tourism, Brian Tyrrell, Stockton University Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies, Mike Tidwell, director**

of sales and marketing at Seaview Dolce Hotel and Golf Club, Sandi Harvey, vice president of sales for Meet AC, and Oliver Cooke, Stockton Associate Professor of Economics.

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**Stockton University**

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