

Shorecast Panelists Say ‘Clean, Safe and Healthy’ Will be Message for Summer 2020

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Galloway, N.J. _ The outlook for the summer of 2020 at the Jersey Shore will depend on how quickly businesses can open, what guidelines and restrictions are in place when they do, and how well the hospitality and tourism industry not only responds to new guidelines, but markets the message in a way that encourages visitors to return.

“The message has always been clean and safe,” said Larry Sieg, Director of Communications and Marketing for the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority at the 12th annual Jersey Shorecast. “Now we will have to add healthy, that we can provide a healthy environment.”

The Shorecast, sponsored by the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute for Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism (LIGHT) at Stockton University, was held as a webinar this year to accommodate COVID-19 guidelines.

Mark Blum, publisher of The Press of Atlantic City and LIGHT Advisory Board chairman moderated the panel. Jane Bokunewicz, the new coordinator of LIGHT welcomed the more than 150 people who watched the webinar.

Panelists were:

- Donna Albano, Associate Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies, Stockton University
- Michael Busler, Professor of Business Studies-Finance, Stockton University
- Michael Chait, President, Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce
- Lori Pepenella, Chief Executive Officer at Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce
- Larry Sieg, Director- Communications and Marketing, Casino Reinvestment Development Authority
- Michael Tidwell, Director of Sales and Marketing, Seaview a Dolce Hotel.

Blum asked a series of questions, then took questions from the participants.

Panelists noted that the forecast for the season will depend a lot on when the season will begin. Busler said businesses need to open by May 15, noting they had already lost early spring and Easter weekend business.

“I’m especially concerned about small businesses (that rely on the summer),” Busler said.

All said 2019 had been an excellent season, and 2020 was on track to be as good, if not better, until the coronavirus crisis. They noted that even when businesses do open, social distancing guidelines are likely to be in effect that could increase costs and reduce profits, but are crucial to gain public confidence.

“We have to look for opportunities,” Chait said, noting the restaurants that have developed or expanded takeout service.

Restaurants may have fewer tables, and hotels may book rooms every other day.

Busler noted that the increase in the minimum wage may also have an impact on businesses’ ability to hire.

Speakers also noted that the use of technology has expanded rapidly and is likely to remain in effect or grow in some areas.

“The conversation has gone from being hypothetical, to how to do it now,” Pepenella said.

Tidwell said they are maintaining contact with guests, and the industry will have to be flexible to adapt to guests’ concerns and any future developments in the pandemic.

Speakers said the proximity of the Jersey shore to so many people is an asset that should be developed.

“I think we will benefit from pent-up demand and the opportunity for day trips,” Albano said. “We have to capitalize on the drive-in market.”

Chait said the loss of luxury tax revenue will affect the ability to host large events, but that there is now an opportunity to develop and recruit smaller, regional events using the larger spaces like the Atlantic City Convention Center to provide effective distancing.

Pepenella and Chait said they have already been working with their members and small businesses to stay on top of guidelines and make sure they are prepared and can move quickly once they can open.

“We are all working behind the scenes to open strong,” Pepenella said.

NOTE: [A Zoom recording of the event](#) is available to view: A list of the questions asked at the Shorecast is below along with the approximate location on the tape.

- Q: How did the local tourism industry do in 2019? **Minute 00:00**
- Q: What is the 2020 season going to be like? **Minute 6:30**
- Q: How long is it going to take to recover? **Minute 24:00**
- Q: How has your business been impacted by COVID-19? **Minute 41:20**
- Q: What will be your focus for the season? **Minute 50:15**
- Q: Other than COVID-19 what are the trends? **Minute 54:50**
- Q: Are there opportunities for growth for hospitality and tourism? **Minute 1:00:30**

OTHER QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC: Minutes 1:15:30 to 1:45

- Q: How can businesses work with government when there is so much uncertainty?
- Q: How will COVID-19 affect the fishing industry?
- Q: If we open and there is another outbreak, what will that do to the message that is is safe?
- Q: What is the status of shore home rentals and demand?
- Q: What is the impact on the real estate market overall?
- Q: How will social distancing be implemented in restaurants?
- Q: Once we reopen, how do we entice groups, conventions to come?
- Q: How do you sensitively market a business?
- Q: What do you see as the role of technology in business moving forward? Will there be more automation?
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