

Stockton University, Tourism and Continuing Education with Dr. Donna Albano

Transcript

J: Hello and welcome to Meet AC's newest podcast series, Atlantic City Voices. I'm Jessica Kasunich, communications manager with Meet AC,

K: And I'm Karina Anthony, marketing director with me, Meet AC, and we will be your official podcast hosts for Atlantic City Voices

J: Throughout our monthly series of Atlantic City voices we are looking forward to interviewing various voices of Atlantic City, who are important leaders in our community and destination.

K: The topics we discuss will vary but will mainly focus on important conversations around regenerative tourism and redevelopment and investment throughout Atlantic City.

J: We'd like to welcome and introduce our podcast guests, Dr. Donna Albano and Associate Professor in the Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies Program, at Stockton University's School of Business. Donna is committed to working with many local industry associations and organizations to advance educational initiatives and provide scholarship opportunities to students studying hospitality and tourism management.

D: Hello, friends. Thank you for having me.

K: Of course, Donna, can you tell our listeners more about yourself and your professional journey with Stockton University?

D: My pleasure, so I think it's important to recognize that I am a student of a hospitality management program. Graduated with my undergraduate degree in hospitality management and have worked in the hospitality industry in various segments of the field for over 20 years before becoming a hospitality educator. So, one of those stints was in Atlantic City, in a hotel, casino and hotel operations. But I have experience in food and beverage operations, country club operations and my family even owned and operated a restaurant franchise. So, my experience in the industry is rooted in my ability to be a hospitality educator and I've been teaching hospitality and tourism for 18 years at Stockton University.

J: That's a really great background and seems like you fully immersed yourself from the get-go, so I think you're the perfect asset to the program at Stockton University.

D: Why, thank you. It takes, it takes a team here. We have several full-time faculty in the program. In addition to an internship coordinator. We sit in the school of business of that provide students with the extra credibility of obtaining a business degree in conjunction with being able to focus on hospitality and tourism. So, it's really all of my worlds colliding and it's a perfect match for me.

K: Speaking of internships, you've helped us coordinate a few interns with our internship program, and we're forever grateful for that and now we take on interns just about every semester. So, thank you for that, Donna.

D: My pleasure. It's one of the best things we can do. I mean, we're providing an educated interested, engaged student in the field of hospitality and tourism. And industry partners like Meet AC can help train and educate those students just as much as we do, theoretically, as you do in practice. It's Win-Win.

K: And we think that showcasing hospitality to the younger generation, especially in Atlantic County, will help them realize that there's a variety of jobs here and hopefully keep them within the community.

D: That's all day, every day, Karina. That's what I do.

J: So, what makes Stockton University and Atlantic City a perfect match?

D: Great question. Stockton, for most people, know that we have a very long history in Atlantic City. We're engaged on every level, including educating community engagement, community service, industry partnerships, as well as being the first Atlantic City's university district and the district stretches from the bay to the ocean in the Chelsea section of the city. And you may or may not have noticed, but I hope the people notice. The University District banners that fly throughout the area. So, we are a physical presence from the very beginning. We started in Atlantic City and now and now we have a pretty physical presence in Atlantic City. So, it makes sense on every level.

K: I think just everyone seeing Stockton and when they come into Atlantic City, as well as those banners that you talked about, that presence really showcases Atlantic City's honor to the community and to enriching the lives of the local community as well.

D: Agreed, I think you know, the physical presence is important, but I think the work that we do in that in and around that building, I think the university district becomes significant because it's not just what happens in the four walls of the of the structure. But, you know, we're living learning and earning is what we like to say in that footprint. So, our students are moving about and engaged in the community and we hope the community is engaged with us as we grow in that in that footprint that you describe Karina.

K: Yes, and you can also see the economic impact on that as well. You see a lot of different restaurants popping up, the Chelsea Business District you're seeing some new real estate ventures come up as well.

D: It's rewarding because I teach on that campus. So, I you know, I literally drive in from either for many of the directions and you're right, I've seen an evolution of growth and revitalization, honestly, in that area.

J: Yeah, I think it really further diversifies our destination, Stockton University, having an Atlantic City campus that allows these students to whether they live where they work or they play here. So, I really think it's a great asset to our destination.

K: How do you foresee tourism evolving in Atlantic City within the next two to five years?

D: Love the question, thank you. I don't have a crystal ball, but if history is any indicator of the future, Atlantic City has always been able to reinvent itself from a tourism perspective since the 1920s through

prohibition, the advent of legalized gambling, to the exciting environment that we see today. This is a place where we still see big investments, unique attractions, and the iconic draw of the beach and boardwalk.

K: We can, you know, talking about reinvention that kind of goes hand-in-hand with regenerative tourism and eco-tourism also that Stockton brings to Atlantic City and educating people about the various ecological aspects of our destination.

D: Yeah, that's a no brainer for Stockton we have had a marine science field, field science program and station, and we've always had that as part of a program at Stockton. And we have environmental studies, and we have a sustainability program as well. So, the physical asset is certainly allowed us to enhance that, but it's always been rooted in Stockton's educational mission.

J: So, Stockton University has partnered with Meet AC to organize professional development training, experiential education workshops and national networking opportunities for meeting and event planners. Can you talk more about the continuing education for meeting and in that manner?

D: Absolutely, and you know that I'm extremely excited about this initiative and this is the kind of work I pride myself in being connected to. So, this partnership is a no brainer for Stockton because it allows us to capitalize on the rich educational offerings that we have beyond just the student population that enroll with us for degree purposes. It makes sense for us to be able to offer professional training, workshops, lectures and networking opportunities to industry partners like Meet AC. We had an initial DEI Educational Workshop and Women's Leadership Panel, and it was a great opportunity for us to display our capabilities as well as meet the needs of Meet AC's meeting planner population. So the result of that has spawned several other opportunities for us to engage in programing for conventions, coming to Atlantic City, presentation proposals, and there are several future workshops in the works

J: Yeah, the DEI workshop panel that we partnered on the with Stockton was really impressive and impactful, and I think a lot of people took away some great takeaways from the entire day, whether it was from the workshops or the great panel of speakers of diverse speakers that you guys had implemented.

D: It just showcases just one of many things that we're able to do, like physically in that building, but also holding, pulling resources and acting as a conduit to be able to partner again with Meet AC and other entities in Atlantic City that would be interested in similar services.

K: And I think that sets us apart as a destination because we can offer these type a variety of continuing education programs, which eventually we hope will lead to a continuing education plan or credits.

D: Right, that's in the works, we'd love to formalize. I mean, we're still in infancy stages with assessing the demand and seeing what we need to formalize as far as programing. But it's really the opportunities are many, and I just look forward to seeing how it evolves.

K: Well, you know, you have to start somewhere, and that's kind of where my next question comes from. Another program you're involved with in coordination with NJTIA and LIGHT is a certified tourism professional certificate, and I actually had the pleasure in assisting you with building the coursework for this program. Can you tell our listeners how this programing came to fruition and the ultimate mission and vision?

D: Absolutely, it's been a joy to work with you and industry colleagues I tapped talents like yourself, and this opportunity was an outreach from the New Jersey Tourism Industry Association which is the NJTIA and this is an industry statewide trade association that includes destination marketing organizations, convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce that all promote and serve the tourism industry in New Jersey. The membership felt the need to scale up and approach Stockton, Levinson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism, affectionately known as LIGHT, about partnering to create and deliver the Certified Tourism Industry Professional Certificate. So, the NJTIA members can take all or any of the 22 units series courses toward the completion of that certificate and Karina you and I worked on the marketing and brand identity which is the first course to be rolled out in the series.

K: Yeah, it was, you know, it was a unique type of mission to really set the template for these types of courses with the first one being marketing. And that is really important to a destination is the marketing of it and how you are putting forth your destination branding and how you're really speaking to your clients and visitors and what type of town you have as a destination

D: Totally agree, which is why I was eager to engage in that particular subject matter cause we set in a footprint that, well, one does it well, if you ask me and two I think it was great that the members said it's time to reskill. There's a lot that this subject matter moves quickly and there's a lot of content to be, as you know, taught and learned. So, I think that it's a great first segment, I think it will really highlight what needs to be done and you're right, it needs to be front and center from these organizations to market their own tourism destination marketing.

K: Yeah, marketing it's not just pretty pictures of your destination it's really telling the brand story and involving your local community in those efforts as well.

D: Agreed. And I think I think self-promoting aside that we did a great job teasing out the key point that in the in the series of the certificate for people to consider and really move forward in their own marketing and branding of their destinations.

J: Yeah, we're really excited to see how this coursework and certificate pan out for the future. So as we wrap up here, we have one final question that we'd like to ask all of our guests. Can you tell us your top three favorite restaurants to dine at in Atlantic City?

D: Sure, no pressure. I think what I'd like to say, if it's okay that we're a foodie town, we are absolutely a foodie town. So, anybody listening to this podcast needs to know that we have every size and scope of restaurant. You know, we have four iron chefs in this town I've had the good fortune to be able to patronize most of the restaurants in Atlantic City, quite frankly. So, one I've been here a long time, and two I consider it research work, right? It's directly tied to it's my duty. So, I patronize a lot of the restaurants, but I do want to make it clear that there is something for everyone irrelevant of what my favorites are. But right now, today, there's a small restaurant on Tennessee Avenue called Rhythm and Spirits. My heart tends to go towards people versus products, right? So, I love this operation for culinary talent, service talent, and wine knowledge. And that's where I tend to migrate. Having said that, my second favorite restaurant right now is Setaara, and that's a small restaurant in Atlantic City, that has a French and Afghan theme, and that's a BYO. But they're very serious about their food and culture in that restaurant. And then it's a third, but it's a heavy third because the entire Dougherty family restaurant are my favorites go to consistent, hardworking, reliable, and great supporters of tourism in our industry and Stockton as well. So, they would be my three.

K: Those are some fabulous options Donna, and what's cool about them is they're outside of casino properties. While we love all of our casino restaurants and it's great for visitors to get to see them. Looking at those local establishments and those community projects, it's really a unique way to approach your favorite restaurant list.

D: I agree and like we do love our casino restaurant. I could have easily rattled off, you know, five. I make a point to say, you know, there's Iron Chefs in this town for a reason because we're a foodie town and the food's amazing, but we get the pleasure of kind of ferreting out these local super passionate restaurant tours that really give back to our community by staying engaged and promoting tourism and creating a great food and beverage experience for us locals but tourists as well.

J: Absolutely I love how you incorporate the community and even tourists I like to tell people who haven't been here in a while, go to the local store and to give them suggestions of local hidden gem spots. So, I really like how you homed in on those top three favorites. Believe it or not, I have not been to Setaara, so I am looking forward to trying that restaurant. But Rhythm and Spirits, great and also Dougherty's can't go wrong with the Dougherty family.

D: Never, I agree.

K: Donna thank you so much for being a guest on Atlantic City Voices. We look forward to growing our partnership with you and Stockton University.

D: My pleasure.

J: Thank you for listening. And stay tuned for next month's podcast to find out who the next Atlantic City voice will be.