

Introduction to Atlantic City Voices with Larry Sieg

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 are so excited to begin this podcast series and look forward to bringing our audience quality content along the way.

K: Our podcast guest today is someone who needs no introduction. He has almost 30 years of work experience in the tourism sales and hospitality industry and is proactive in promoting Atlantic City as a premier destination for meetings, conventions and leisure group travel.

J: Without further ado, we'd like to introduce our first podcast guest, Larry Sieg, president and CEO for Meet AC and the Atlantic City Sports Commission.

K: Hi, Larry, and welcome.

J: Hey, Larry.

L: Good morning, Jessica, good morning, Karina thank you for having me today.

K: Of course, Larry, let's dive in. How did you begin your career in the travel and tourism industry? And what do you love most about it?

L: I actually, you know, early on I started my career out, not in tourism and hospitality, but in health care. And in the early eighties I met a gentleman in Atlantic City by the name of Roy Goldberg. Roy Goldberg was a tour operator. He owned a motor coach company. He owned an airline. And he actually is the one who talked me into coming over to tourism and hospitality and mentored me back in the early eighties and throughout the rest of my career, all the way up into the early two thousands.

K: Well, so you started within the medical industry. Actually, I did too, and then I moved on to real estate marketing, which kind of transitioned to hospitality for me. Can you tell us what you like most about that transition that you made and in hospitality now?

L: I think it was an opportunity, certainly to meet people all over the country, an opportunity to travel. Also, you know it, we create experience and memories for people. And I think that's my favorite thing

about it is creating memories for people and also changing perceptions is also a great part of this industry. So I couldn't be more happier than when I changed into this field.

J: Yeah, Larry, I love the way that you bring up, you know, experiences. You know, we're all about the experiences here in Atlantic City, and we love creating meaningful meetings here in Atlantic City and creating experiential activities for our attendees and leisure visitors. At the inception of your appointment with Meet AC we were in the middle of a pandemic. How did you navigate leading a team during a time of uncertainty?

L: Well, it was definitely an interesting time. I came on board in July of 2020. The nice part about it or the benefit to it is I already had the opportunity to work with everyone at Meet AC for the past seven years in my role as director of marketing and communications for the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, which is our benefactor here at Meet AC. So there was not really a learning curve, but I think what I did during the pandemic is everything is, you know, is via either Zoom or Teams just keeping the focus on the client, what the client's needs are, making sure that we stayed in contact with the client and also just keeping a positive attitude about, you know, working remotely from home, maintaining again communication with the staff. So I think that pretty much was my way of navigating until we could be back in-person again in the office.

K: Were there any surprises, things that you didn't expect when you came on board with Meet AC? When you made that transition?

L: Yeah, actually, there were several things, and especially in the height of the pandemic. You know, I had always been from the school that, you know, you go to work, you go to the office nine to five everyday Monday through Friday. And working remotely was very, very, very challenging for me in the beginning. But then I realized and, you know, after seeing and talking with other staff and seeing the success and the productivity, I realized. Ok, times have changed now we don't need to be tethered to a desk from nine to five anymore, and we can still be productive, if not more productive, than being in the office. So, I think that was one of the realizations that I came to.

K: Yeah, that's a really progressive school of thought, and I think that's the way that businesses are leaning towards, too. Can you tell our listeners more about clean, safe and healthy policies put in place not only at the Atlantic City Convention Center, but also throughout our destination?

L: Sure. Well, let's start at the convention center, of course, because when we were able to go back into in-person meetings, it was really, really important that we took enhanced health and safety measures to make sure that we were not only just protecting our guests, but protecting our staff, protecting our vendors. That was really important. So, you know, we put extra cleaning protocols in place. Of course, we followed all CDC, local and state health department guidelines, but the city itself did a tremendous job. Our casino partners our non-casino partners, our restaurants. You know, everybody made adjustments and they pivoted to make sure that they were doing everything that would keep people safe and healthy. When the time was right to visit again.

J: Yeah, and just to give our listeners a bit more the Atlantic City Convention Center is a state-owned building, so we do require guests to wear masks. However, the event organizers can take it a step further and require vaccination cards or a negative COVID test. So, you know, we really haven't been seeing much pushback from that, and attendees are willing and excited to get back and meet in person.

L: Yeah, I think with the, you know, the uncertain climate that, let's face it, we're still in and it's going to be two years later soon. People want to feel comfortable; they want to feel that they're coming into it, a space that's healthy for them. You know, also, Jess, you talked about with the convention center. We are one of the GBAC Star facilities and GBAC for those that are listening that aren't sure maybe what that is the Global Bio Risk Advisory Council. And so, the GBAC Star is, you know, the cleaning industry's only outbreak prevention, response and recovery accreditation for facilities like ours. And in addition to that, we're also have been awarded the LEED Gold Certification, which is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. That's a rating system that was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. So we're very proud of those two certifications. And really, when our clients and visitors come into the facility and they see those two accreditations, they're assured their comfort level is raised tremendously.

J: Absolutely. We are very proud of those accolades here at the Atlantic City Convention Center. Let's fast forward to June 2021. We're officially back to business with no capacity restrictions. How is business been since and what is this look like in 2022 and beyond?

L: Well, business has really, really been great at the end of 21 and the beginning of 22. Matter of fact, today we are loading in for the Northeast Pool and Spa Show. So over the next three days, we're going to be welcoming 11,000 people into the building for that show a lot of shows coming up in the future. one of the big ones that we're going to be doing this year is the National NAACP Conference that will take place July 14 to the 21st throughout the entire destination, and we're looking forward to hosting over 10,000 people for that prestigious conference. We're very, very fortunate. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to host that event.

J: Yeah, we're super excited to host NAACP this summer, along with many sporting events coming up second annual Jimmy Johnson Fish Week this summer as well. I know a lot of people are looking forward to that as they watch the fish be reeled in over at the Golden Nugget. So very exciting events coming up we have a consumer shows such as Boat Show and the Classic Car Show, so a lot of things to look forward to in 2022.

L: Yeah, there's some great events happening.

K: So Larry, what do you think is on the horizon for Meet AC and the Atlantic City Sports Commission?

L: Well, I think that we're going to continue to see increased interest in our destination. Our team does an amazing job of going out and promoting the destination and providing them a reason why they should bring their meetings to our destination number one. We're within a drive of a third of the population of the United States, so we're going to see, I think, a lot of these national conferences that used to take place once a year. I think we're going to see them break out into more regionals, which is really a great opportunity for us. We're positioned really well in the northeast between New York, Philadelphia, Washington and Baltimore for us to host those types of meetings. And again, it's a drive market. People feel very comfortable getting in their own car and driving. They're still, you know, as you know, there are still some trepidations about some people for getting on an airplane in the masking everything. So, I think that's going to be a real plus for Meet AC. On the Atlantic City Sports Commission side, Jess mentioned JJ Fish Week that will be coming back in July. Also, you know, we are positioned really well to do sporting events, especially outdoor sporting events, being on the beach and the ocean in Atlantic City here we have open space. We're hosting the Junior National AVP Volleyball

Championships this summer that will be coming back again. Vertical Adventures on the beach will be coming back again. And then also, we're very excited this year. This is the first time in Atlantic City in September we're going to be hosting the U.S. Open Pickleball Championships. Pickleball for those of you who don't know, is a sport that is just really like swept the country. So, we are definitely excited to have them. As matter of fact, we will be doing a press conference announcing that event this Thursday. So there's a lot on the horizon for both Meet AC and the Sports Commission.

K: We're certainly priming Atlantic City to be a premiere destination for not only entertainment, but different events as well. And you can see and hear that Larry is talking about so many, so much variety of different events coming here to Atlantic City.

J: Ok, we have one final question top three favorite restaurants to dine out in Atlantic City? Go.

L: Café 2825, Knife and Fork, and Capriccio.

J: Yes, those are all such great picks. I know some of those are on our list as well.

K: They are. And what's nice is that some are in casino properties. Then some a few are standalone restaurants that you can kind of venture outside of the casinos and see where they are and get a little bit more of the history of Atlantic City when you go there.

J: Yeah, there's a little bit for everyone here in Atlantic City. Any type of cuisine, are you know, talking a little bit more about our dining options, we really have exploded over the past couple of years, whether it's celebrity chefs or our local hidden gems, and we're really proud to showcase those offerings to attendees and visitors alike. So, Larry, thank you so much for being our first guest here as we wrap up our first podcast series of Atlantic City Voices. This has been a great conversation, and we look forward to a successful 2022.

L: Great. Thank you so much for having me guys have a great day.

K: Thanks so much, Larry.

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