

Special Events to Boost Tourism This Summer, Panelists Say at Stockton's Jersey Shorecast

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Galloway Township, NJ - Atlantic City plans additional special events, a major renovation of Pacific Avenue and perhaps a new stage on one of the piers, to attract new tourists and expand its market, Mayor Don Guardian said today at Stockton's Jersey Shorecast event.

"Concerts bring the right demographic to Atlantic City," Guardian said. Events such as the upcoming Blake Shelton concert in July "introduce Atlantic City back as a fun place with something other cities don't have - a beach," he said. But holding year-round concerts on a beach is problematic, so "maybe we should be in the business of building a permanent stage on one of our piers," he said. "We could have weekly events," instead of one or two big concerts a summer.

Pacific Avenue will be renovated and repaved by the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) after the Miss America pageant is over in the fall, Guardian said. The street will also receive new sidewalks, utility infrastructure and lighting.

Atlantic City also has been designated by the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to get new LED lighting, replacing lights at 8,700 locations throughout the city and saving an estimated \$820,000 (or 60 percent) a year in utility costs, Guardian said.

Guardian was the keynote speaker at the Jersey Shorecast at the Carnegie Center in Atlantic City, which was sponsored by the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality & Tourism (LIGHT) of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

He said the city will have 50 video screens on the Boardwalk showing the Atlantic City Air Show as it happens on Aug. 13, "bringing the wow" factor.

Special events, as well as promoting nightlife, eco-tourism and all the Jersey Shore has to offer are the best ways to ensure a successful tourism season, experts agreed during two panel discussions.

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Panelists from Stockton College and Atlantic, Cape May and Ocean counties predicted business will be good all along the shore this summer, as the economy and jobs continue to rebound.

“The recession is over, or at least we’re feeling better about it,” said Diane Wieland, director of the Cape May County Department of Tourism. Last year, Cape May County’s lodging industry generated \$2.24 billion and retail hit \$1.1 billion for the first time, she said, adding that she expects to see more increases this year.

Cape May County tourist “web traffic is spiking after a very cold, very harsh winter,” said Vicki Clark, president of the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce. “People are more anxious than ever to come down and enjoy some beach time. We are very optimistic.”

Weekend reservations in Atlantic City and Cape May County are already well booked, but there is availability - and opportunities for promotions - in mid-week, said Clark and Joseph Kelly, president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce.

Lori Pepenella, director of Destination Marketing, LBI Region – Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce, said the lingering perceptions that the Jersey Shore was not ready after Hurricane Sandy have all dissipated.

“We have twice as many inquiries as we did in spring 2013, and very rarely as they asking ‘are we open?’ They’re asking about events,” Pepenella said.

Dr. Brian Tyrrell, associate professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies at Stockton, cited a tourism promotion survey by LIGHT earlier this year showing that just over half of the visitors to New Jersey came to the Jersey shore within the past year, although bad weather in June 2013 kept visitors away in the early part of last summer.

“I truly believe it’s going to be a better season this year and one of the best ever,” Dr. Tyrrell said.

Dr. Michael Busler, professor of Business Studies at Stockton, predicted a 4-5 percent increase in tourism business for most of the shore, as long as gas prices stay under \$4 a gallon.

Dr. Israel Posner, executive director of the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism at Stockton, served as the panels’ moderator.

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