

LIGHTs On – Summer 2022

Alumni Interview Transcript

Caitlin Lee, '22

Assistant Manager of Event Services, Rutgers University-Camden

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Sarah Grady (SG): Hello, my name is Sarah Grady. I'm the Assistant Director of the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism, part of the School of Business at Stockton University. Today I am here with Caitlin Lee who is going to tell us a little bit about her experience in the gaming, hospitality and tourism industry. Hi Caitlin, thank you for joining us today, perhaps we can start by having you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Caitlin Lee (CL): Hello everyone, thank you for having me, my name is Caitlin Lee and I'm currently a graduate student at Stockton University. I enrolled in the dual degree hospitality and MBA program, and I'm currently finishing my last semester of the MBA program in the fall.

I currently work at Rutgers University Camden; I am the Assistant Manager of Event Services. And prior to this experience I interned with the Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce as an event coordinator intern.

I also worked at Stockton's Event Services and Campus Center Operations office, and I was a student scheduler under Mary Kate McKenna and prior to getting into academic events I worked for five years in food and beverage, three of which I was a manager and head cook as well.

SG: Sounds like a wonderful amount of experience for someone just embarking on their career. So, could you describe a current challenge – of all of those things that you've done what would you say would be or would have been a challenge?

CL: I think, even before the pandemic staffing was always a challenge with certain positions, and you know certain shifts the hospitality industry it's very diverse and it encompasses a lot of weekends and evenings and holidays, which I know is difficult for many individuals. So, especially now, after the pandemic during the great resignation you're seeing so many people shift industries. Staffing has really been a big challenge across any discipline within the industry. Even in academic events, certain areas of catering and certain facilities were just understaffed as events are starting to boom after the pandemic and people want to get back to doing things the normal way. So, really the staffing is just kind of something that is a challenge across the board right now.

SG: How did your experience at Stockton prepare you for this challenge?

CL: So, during undergrad the hospitality program I was able to take a lot of different classes. I really took a lot of electives as well; I didn't specify in one area I really wanted to diversify my skills. So, I think that that really contributes to cross training as a whole, I think if you're able to kind of be thrown into multiple positions and you have knowledge of multiple areas, you can really make yourself universal in the industry and really make yourself an asset.

SG: Excellent experience and important advice - and that's my next question. What advice would you have for someone who's looking to embark on a career in hospitality and tourism?

CL: I would definitely get as many internships, as you possibly can, whether you're a graduate student in a dual degree program or just a graduate student or even an undergrad. Unfortunately, two years of my undergrad degree was kind of consumed by the pandemic, but I was fortunately able to be an intern with the Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce, which was a great networking opportunity. And the networking is just so important, I think that that really can make and break some positions and some opportunities, you may have. I think that if you get the right internship like what's at the Atlantic city Chamber of Commerce, or even working at Stockton. I really found a mentor in my internship at Stockton, who's Mary Kate McKenna, she's in the Event Services office, and that really led me to my career in higher education events. I really liked doing the hands on with students and still having that area of events from the hospitality industry. I think really the more internships and experiences, you can get you're going to see what you like, and you don't like. And that's going to kind of lead you down the direction that you're going to be happiest.

SG: Great advice for anyone, and especially for someone looking to experience all that the hospitality industry has to offer. So, Caitlin any other comments, anything you'd like our viewers to know?

CL: If anyone is in the undergrad program at Stockton for Hospitality I would definitely try to enjoy as many experiences as you can. They have some great clubs, and the professors are all amazing. I had some great experiences. I was a TA [Teaching Assistant] for Dr. Bill Quain and Dr. Jane Bokunewicz she's my advisor and she really helped me pioneer the program for the dual degree. I really think, the more you can really be hands on with professors and the more experiences you can have, whether it's tours or just volunteer work – like the beer fast or anything. I think that's really – it's great networking and it's going to make your experience so much better, because not only are you getting experience, but you'll be able to really connect with your peers.

SG: Great stuff to share and I want to thank you again Caitlin for joining us today and for sharing your experience and your insight and advice. Thank you all for viewing this interview today, and we hope to have more for you soon.

CL: Thank you.