

Panel Says Summer Business OK Overall, Despite Bad Weather and Inflation

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Atlantic City, N.J. Bad weather, high gas prices and inflation definitely had a negative impact on the Jersey Shore summer economy in 2023, but labor shortages weren't as bad as predicted, visitor numbers were up and the casino industry is continuing to grow.

Those were some of the key messages at the fourth annual Jersey Shoreview, a panel discussion of regional business leaders sponsored by the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism (LIGHT) in Stockton University's School of Business.

LIGHT's Faculty Director Jane Bokunewicz moderated the panel that featured:

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- Vehicles through the Pleasantville toll on the Atlantic City Expressway at \$5 million, up 3.7%

Bokunewicz also said nongaming revenue is becoming more and more important to casinos. In 2017, revenue from gaming activity made up 61% of total net revenue with 39% from nongaming revenue streams. But as of ~~year~~ 2022, 55% of total annual casino net revenue came from gaming and 45% from nongaming sources. This 55% to 45% ratio continued through the second quarter of 2023.

It's getting closer to the model of Las Vegas where much of the revenue comes from nongaming attractions, and that's a sign of the industry trying to diversify its offerings, Bokunewicz said.

More focus on nongaming amenities leads nicely into more promotion of businesses outside of the casinos, Lacca said. Her agency does the marketing for the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and Do AC, and she said focusing on that is the key to continued success in Atlantic City.

People are looking for authentic experiences outside the casino walls, said Lacca, who added that was the focus on their summer marketing campaign and led to pageview increases of 20% to 40% on the atlanticcitynj.com website.

We are a short ride away. We want to make sure that people realize there is value coming to Atlantic City, she said. We made sure we really targeted the local market.

Lacca said it's important to highlight newer attractions, such as the inaugural North to Shore Festival and the Orange Loop in Atlantic City, and for all the city's stakeholders of all different sizes to come together.

When you coordinate and collaborate, all those (marketing) budgets add up, she said. We are giving the consumers what they want. I live here. I see the traffic on the Boardwalk. Now, we just need to make sure that there are opportunities to capture their wallet.

One of this summer's challenges, especially early in the season, was poor weather, Franz said.

You can't predict the weather, and that's what was against us this year, she said. We're unit

can realize those potential opportunities that create a win-win for everybody. It's a work in progress, but we are making nice progress.

Story and photos by Mark Melhorn

PHOTO (credit: Mark Melhorn/Stockton University): From left, Jane Bokunewicz, the faculty director of the Lloyd D. Levenson