

Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce with Michael Chait

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 Meet AC. And we are your official podcast hosts for Atlantic City Voices.

J: Throughout our monthly series of Atlantic City Voices, we will be 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 special guest, Michael Chait, president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce.

K: Hi, Michael. Welcome.

J: Welcome, Michael.

M: Good morning, ladies. Thank you so much for having me.

K: Of course, Michael, can you tell our listeners more about yourself and your journey with the greater AC Chamber of Commerce?

M: Sure. Happy to. You know, born and raised in Atlantic City. So I'm a local, grew up here, spent a lot of time in different jobs in Atlantic City. You know, even as a kid from valet parking and public works to working at Boardwalk Hall and the Atlantic City Convention Center for almost nine years, and a lot of background in marketing and PR with the City of Cape May and Press of Atlantic City. When I was at the press, I was recruited to come over to the Greater Atlantic City Chamber as executive vice president, replaced Joe Kelly, who was there for 25 years, did a phenomenal job as president of the Chamber. So I've been with the chamber now for I can't believe it. It's it's going to be wrapping up five years. I took over as president in January of 2020, right before the pandemic hit. So kind of a trial by fire.

J: You had a real treat their journey right as the pandemic began.

M: Yeah, certainly they caught us all off surprise. But what's nice about Chambers of Commerce and business associations is that we all work together. And it was no time, probably. Was it

more important than during the pandemic? Tremendous amount of legislation coming out, funding mechanisms, just sharing of information on how to keep our visitors, our guests, our employees each other safe. So having access to, you know, every chamber of commerce in the state, a number of them across the country, and several different businesses, associations, you know, allowed us to communicate effectively and efficiently with our members and our region on what we need to do and how we could work better together to get through the pandemic.

K: Speaking of working better together, I know you have strong local ties to the community. Doesn't the greater AC Chamber utilize Stockton students as employees as well?

M: We do. We do. Every year, we we seek interns to help us at a variety of different facets. We've had public policy interns, events coordinators, digital marketing interns are really, really great students. And it gives them a unique opportunity with hands on experience working with, you know, we have 470 members, 60 board members. So I always tell them if they perform well, they're doing it in front of the business community here and there's potential job opportunities for when they're finish up with their internship. So yeah, we love working with college students. It gives them a tremendous opportunity.

J: Yes, those interns are crucial to organizations like ours. What's the greater AC Chamber of Commerce mission and why should a business or organization become a member?

M: You know, our mission is really a better business climate. You know, to sum it up, it's to inform, to connect, to advocate for the overall business community. And I think you've seen a lot of it recently over the years really transform, transition into some social activity, whether it's diversity, equity and inclusion opportunities and information and education to medical with with public health. And certainly here in Atlantic City, we look at all the social issues and how to make Atlantic City a destination that is clean and safe. But if you're looking at what we do as an organization and to accomplish our mission of making, you know, a healthy and vibrant business community, it's connecting. It's making sure that our members are connected in the business community with each other and with us informing them on policy that's coming out, informing them on potential financing opportunities, whether it's through the NJ, EDA or the USDA or a small grant opportunities for some of our nonprofit members that come from CRDA. So there's a lot of opportunities and that education, that piece gives them opportunities to grow as a business and become a better part of the community. And I think that what else we do is really advocate, you know, we work with all of our elected officials that the city local level at the state level and even at the federal level, probably more so than we've done in years past through the pandemic, where we're working with Congressman Landrieu and Senator Booker on a number of initiatives, including the shuttered venues. Operator Grant was it was an enormous one that impacted our region because of we're so heavy in entertainment.

K: Talking about entertainment and vibrancy and growth. One of the most highly anticipated and free events for Atlantic City is the air show. And this year, Meet AC has taken on the role of title sponsor, and we couldn't be more thrilled to be part of Atlantic City's most notable event. Could you tell us some more about it?

M: Yeah, one. Thank you very much for coming on board as the title sponsor for the event. It helps us with all of our logistics and activity and gives great visibility to the destination. Good, positive feedback. We work really well with our veterans and brave men and women, the armed forces that serve, and certainly all of our public safety official. So the air show this is the 19th year we it is headlined by the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds. We have the U.S. Army Golden Knights. We actually have the F-18 from the U.S. Navy this year, which is the plane from Topgun, too, which is pretty cool, but it is an exciting day. The show will probably go from 11 to 11:30 to about 3:30, maybe approaching 4:00 at the latest. But it is a free event for the destination and attracts approximately 400,000 people. You know, there are some corporate hospitality things that we do with show center, but this is this is a huge event for the destination. It's an enormous undertaking. You know, we talked a little bit before about collaboration, and I've never worked on an event that has this much collaboration because you're dealing with everything from the armed forces to your local public safety officials to your local DMO and working with you guys and across the state and different chambers of commerce that help us promote it. But it is South Jersey Transportation Authority does a lot. There's a whole Marine unit that's out there for the New Jersey State Police, Marine Division and the volunteer fire companies. But you want to talk about an exciting, thrilling, fun event on the beach over the Atlantic Ocean. It doesn't get any better than this event. And it has become, you know, kind of the the anchor event for the destination.

J: Absolutely. I know everyone looks forward to this event every year. And it's so incredible to see these pilots in these planes dip and dive over the Atlantic Ocean and come right over your head. There any special surprises in store this year that you can kind of give us a sneak peek?

M: Well, it's kind of funny. David Schultz is our air boss. And what the air boss does is he coordinates everything from the the the aerial demonstrations to civilian and military performers. So he always throws something in the mix and never tells me. So when you're surprised, I'm typically surprised, too. But I think we are in store for some surprises this year. I don't know what they're going to be. He keeps teasing me about it and said It's going to be pretty exciting, something we've never done here. I do know from a civilian performer standpoint, the full throttle aviation team is a team that's never been here before. There are multiple civilian air team. We're going to be taking media up on rides with them, but I'm excited to see them. I've never seen them before. I watch the videos of them, so I think that's something new. The F-18 hasn't been here in years, and obviously with all the excitement of Top Gun to I mean, that's pretty cool to have that jet here and the Thunderbirds are always exciting. And what's great with the armed forces, you know, they talk about flying and then the excitement and the thrill and of aviation. But what excites them is getting on the ground and engaging with us, engaging with our kids. That's where they're focuses. They want to inspire the next generation of brave men and women that join the military. So they said, you know, with top Gun two, they're like, oh, me being a fighter pilot, cool again. And you're seeing recruitment go up because of this move, just like you did with Top Gun before. So it gives us a lot of good things to talk about, gives us an opportunity to celebrate those who serve. But they at the sound of freedom with those jets flying overhead and the excitement that it brings is great. And I think I'll tell you the other thing we don't talk about enough is practice day, the day before, you know, people should come

practice day. There aren't as many people on the beach on practice day and it's the same show. You know, the lineup may be a little bit different in order pending upon what's going on at the airport. But if you want to come to a free event and see the practice day on Tuesday, the day of the airshow, fantastic. It's pretty much the same time, same show.

K: That's some good insider info for locals, especially. I mean, we hear it in our offices so we can just step outside and see what's going on. But, you know, that's that's great insider info. And like you said, this is the anchor event for our destiny. And this will be the first year that I bring my little one to the show. So maybe I'll have a pilot and training.

M: Yeah, how cool. I'll tell you when the Golden Knights land, they look around for kids and the kids help them pack their shoots. I've got pictures of my son and daughter, you know, packing the chutes with the Golden Knights put in their back, putting all the chutes on their back. I mean, it's just they're all trained in marketing and PR. They're fantastic with kids. Fantastic.

K: That's really cool. Could you tell us what is the Flight Line Club?

M: Yeah, Flight Line Club is the only public ticketed area that we sell that the Chamber of Commerce sells. You know, it's a very limited number of seats. It is food all day. It's your burgers, hotdogs, fresh fruit, novelty, ice cream, you know, peanuts, pretzels, but it's variety show center. So it's a very, very limited number of seats we sell out every year. It's a great experience. It's very it makes everything very, very easy for the visitor to come. We have chairs that we provide. There's tent, there's shading, unlimited water. You know, access to that starts at, say, 10 a.m. show is going to start sometime between 11 and 11:30. And like I said, 3:30, 4:00 the show is going to wrap up with the Thunderbirds being kind of the headline performer of the event, but yeah, Flight Line Club, a really, really great experience if you want to make it easy for yourself. And we do have tickets on sale at Atlantic City Air Show .com.

J: Well, as we wrap up, we have one final question that we'd like to ask all of our guests. What are your top three favorite restaurants to dine at in Atlantic City?

M: Wow

K: It's a hard one.

M: There's certainly no shortage of restaurants, right? We've got a lot of restaurants that are members. So I've got to be careful. I pick. But look, when my friends come in the town, I went to school in Ohio and just this past weekend a friend of mine was rower I went to school with was in town from Atlanta. So we went to Rhythm and Spirits for their brunch, which is awesome. You know, it was a first time going there. It was so good. But restaurants that I take them to the White House to get a cheesesteak, to get an Italian the regular sub Gilcrest in Gardner's basin for their blueberry pancakes and Tony's Baltimore grill you know, there are three places that I grew up with as a kid. There's a lot of nostalgia there. But that sausage pie from Tony's Baltimore Grill on a shrimp platter just brings up back too many memories for me. So that's their

kind of three that I take people to. But other friends, I just had a friend in town from Minnesota, you know, we went to knife and Fork Docks, Oyster House, the Dockerty Steakhouse. There is no shortage of restaurants and a lot more coming. So it's exciting if you're a foodie.

J: That's right. There certainly is not a shortage of restaurants here at Atlantic City. And I love that you bring up the nostalgia, but then you also bring up a newer restaurant with rhythm and spirits located on Tennessee Avenue. That's one of my favorites as well with chef Kevin Cronin. And you can't go wrong with blueberry hotcakes. I go across, especially this time of year, with Jersey fresh blueberries.

M: That's right. Absolutely. There's so good.

K: And Michael, we would be remiss if we didn't mention the fact that you created the popular Facebook group Atlantic County Eats that seriously got us through the pandemic with, you know, online ordering for food. And now, I mean, I check there before I make reservations anywhere, I just ask you, am I missing something? That's something new opened up. What should I check out?

M: It's amazing how it's still continued on. You know, we started that two days after all the restaurants shut down just to support the restaurants for for takeout, for takeout food. And it just it kept going. So we manage it. We eliminate all the negative comments because we want look, if you had a bad experience at a restaurant, like we've all had bad days at work, you know, we've all made mistakes. But if you have a bad day as a chef or your food comes out bad and everybody wants to attack you online, get rid of that. Go back to the place of business. They're more than happy to help you. But what that's done and how it's I can't tell you how many restaurants and places I've learned about.

K: That's great. And, you know, it really ties back into your sense of community. So, you know, thank you for doing that and thank you for being a guest on our show, Atlantic City Voices. We hope to see you on the Atlantic City beaches for the exhilarating meet. See Atlantic City air show on August 24th.

M: Yeah, really looking forward to it. Thank you, ladies.

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