

Millennials mixed on living in Cape May

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conductive for starting a life here.”

As a full-time resident, Post does not find a wide variety of entertainment for herself. Every millennial has different interests, and depending on their chosen career path, it can be hard to find a full-time job in their chosen career.

It's not that millennials do not want to own their own businesses, but they lack the capital to do so.

Some Millennials defy pigeon-holing

However, a lack of capital does not stop all millennials.

Anyone who calls millennials lazy and entitled has not met 28-year-old Jesse Lambert. The fourth-generation local, along with his wife, Leigha, owns Coffee Tyme on the beach and a new location, Coffee Tyme on the Washington Street Mall.

“I grew up in Cape May and the only time I left was to go to college,” Jesse Lambert said. “As soon as I was done with college, I knew I wanted to come back here. Cape May is where the heart is, I've always been drawn to it. I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life here.”

Before the Lamberts opened their coffee shops, they worked a variety of jobs in town.

“The Cape May hustle is juggling multiple jobs at the same time,” Jesse Lambert said. “We would work two to three jobs each to save up for rent and traveling. I worked at Sunset Beach Gifts and taught surfing lessons.”

When the Lamberts saw that Coffee Tyme was up for sale by the previous owners, they worked there for a year to make sure they wanted to buy the business.

“For a young couple like us, we were able to get a loan from Sturdy Savings Bank through the Small Business Administration,” Jesse Lambert said.

The 2008 stock market crash continues to plague millennials 10 years later.

“I've heard that the mortgage standards are very strict because of 2008,” Jesse Lambert said. “It's a shame because we would like to be able to buy a house, but it's tough with student and business loans. It will be a while for us.”

Slowly the demographic of visitors and locals in Cape May is changing. More millennials are being drawn to Cape May for a quieter lifestyle, a more active weekend trip or summer vacation.

The Lamberts have seen increasing numbers of younger people stopping by Coffee Tyme.

“It's exciting to see younger people coming in and not just with their families,” Jesse Lambert said. “Friends of mine will come down here. Even people who have come as a child and fallen in love with Cape May are coming back as adults with their kids.”

The Lamberts opened their latest shop on the Washington Street Mall in early 2018.

“It was easier 30 years ago to have a house and a business,” Jesse Lambert said. “We are blessed to have two coffee shops.”

Cape May's millennial appeal is evident through the activities available in town. Cape May has always been an outdoor-friendly



Rachel Shubin/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Tom and Kelsey Medvecky. Kelsey grew up in Cape May and the couple visited while they dated. Eventually they moved here because they love the beach lifestyle.

destination for bicycle riders and beachgoers.

“There has been a push for more active events like bike tours around the island, the Escape the Cape Triathlon and the Cape May Running Co.'s races,” Jesse Lambert said. “Cape May Running Co. is doing an amazing job and that is perfect for millennials.”

Liza Crawford, 26, started visiting Cape May in the summer with her family to see her grandparents. Crawford came to Cape May every summer through college, still visiting after she graduated from Penn State.

“I worked as a nanny outside of Philly,” Crawford said. “I was already working weekends at Cape May Running Co., so when it was time to leave this past October, it was easy to come back here.”

Crawford moved in to her family's home so she could continue to work for Cape May Running Co. (CMRC).

“I do both retail sales and design at CMRC,” Crawford said. “I also will be teaching sailing at the yacht club this summer. I work two jobs at a time and I also dog sit and do freelance design.”

Crawford started the Mile Zero Project, a free fitness group that meets at the Cove Beach at 6:23 a.m. on Wednesday mornings.

“It is based on the free fitness group run in 49 cities around the world,” Crawford said. “It's a group of people who like to work out and anybody can come, no matter what your ability. It creates a community in its own.”

Variety of attractions appeals to millennials

When asked if Cape May appeals to the millennial age group, the bar and music scene as well as the outside activities are mentioned. The Lamberts have never sought after nightlife, but find that there are options for those who enjoy outdoor activities.

“Cape May is heaven for millennials who like outdoor activities,” Jesse Lambert said. “We like to bike around the island, go surfing and even skateboarding. One day we hiked from the canal to Reeds Beach, which took all day. We've always wanted to try paddle boarding around the island.”

Jesse Lambert noted that a small town such as Cape May could not even support a movie theater.

“We had the theater for a long time, but Cape May just doesn't have the year-round economy that it used

a teacher, you need something to do in the summer. Living here, it's like why not work on the beach.”

The Medveckys enjoy going on walks at Higbee Beach with their dog, Iris.

“We also have a great restaurant and bar scene,” Kelsey Medvecky said. “You definitely cannot beat the food. We've traveled all over and we definitely have the best restaurants.”

She said she has found that more is happening in Cape May than ever before.

“Cape May is a hotspot with the music scene, open mic nights, bachelorette parties,” Kelsey Medvecky said. “There are also so many breweries, distilleries and wineries.”

The only difference between Cape May and other towns is the proximity to typical shopping.

“When we lived in the Princeton area, I had five different grocery stores within 10 miles,” Kelsey Medvecky said. “People visit Cape May and are surprised the closest mall is 45 minutes away.”

The Medveckys do similar activities to their friends who live in other places, like going to the movie theaters and out to dinner, or eating with friends.

“More things stay open in winter now,” Tom Medvecky said. “We have a closer group of friends.”

The Medveckys believe Cape May will appeal to millennials because it is a slower pace and significantly less time sitting in traffic. And visitors and locals alike can see the sun set over the beach at the end of the day.

“I think Cape May will appeal to millennials with the development of the bar and drinking scene,” Kelsey Medvecky said. “It's a big draw for the younger people and the young professional group. More development brings more jobs that aren't just seasonal.”

Tom Medvecky said he would take living at the beach over a Trader Joe's any day.

Working one job doesn't pay bills

As for me, the writer of this article, I too am a millennial. I am 24 years old and work a full-time job and work as a freelance journalist. I have lived in Cape May full time for over a year and have found that few people work just one job. Most work at least two jobs to afford living in a beach resort town.

For the entirety of my life, I have spent at least two weeks a summer in Cape May. During my college years, I interned and worked at local businesses. All it took was a small taste of living in Cape May for me to form my plans to move here after graduation.

Once I moved to Cape May, I realized just how difficult it is to afford rent by myself. I lived with my parents for a few months before moving into a place with roommates. After nine months with roommates, I found a place to live on my own. I still find it very difficult to afford life here. Without the support of my parents, I would not be able to afford to live here on my income.

Affording rent and bills in a tourist town means the cost of living is higher and, like Post said, it makes it very difficult to save up for a down payment on a house. I have never ordered avocado toast in my life, yet I am so far away from being able to own a home.

I agree with the Lamberts and Medveckys that a life at the beach has so much to offer in terms of outdoor activities. My perfect outdoor activity is reading on the beach.

If you're a millennial who does not like to drink, your available activities become more limited. I also agree with Post that the music is geared toward the baby boomer generation. I have yet to find an advertised music event in town that I want to attend.

The future of tourism in Cape May lies in the hands of millennials. They make up a huge portion of the workforce and want all the same things their parents have, such as owning cars and homes.

It's crucial that Cape May continues to think of millennials as new businesses come and go, catering to the age range of those visiting. Millennials are starting to settle down and

get married at earlier ages. Some millennials choose to have kids at a younger age than their parents' generation.

For millennials who like to drink alcohol, the need is being met with the breweries, distilleries and wineries. Coffee shops such as Coffee Tyme are hitting the mark, being run by millennials and catering to millennials.

Owners of local shops run by millennials know how to market to their target audience. Any millennial who has a dream of owning a store in Cape May should not be scared off by the finances, because Jesse and Leigha Lambert show that perseverance works.

Millennials who live in Cape May sacrifice easy access to big box stores, but with the Internet nothing is more than a few days shipping away. In fact, millennials even en-

joy shopping local because the boutique stores carry unique products that aren't easily available elsewhere.

Cape May is a National Historic Landmark City that offers so much rich history. There are people who might think millennials will not enjoy learning the history of the town because they are selfish and entitled. With the right mindset and marketing, millennials can be interested in repeating history facts when posting a selfie on Instagram.

I urge anyone who believes stereotypes about millennials to sit down with a millennial and just talk to them (but don't call us on our phones) and ask questions. Yes, I love a good iced coffee as much as the next millennial, but I don't think my coffee addiction is the main problem keeping me from building up my savings.



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Jesse and Leigha Lambert worked multiple jobs at once before opening their two successful coffee shops in Cape May.