

Cape May Star and Wave

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Economist predicts strong 2016 tourist season

Atlantic Cape VP says not to expect much job growth in Cape May, Atlantic counties

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

MAYS LANDING - If the weather cooperates, Cape May County could see its best ever tourism year, according to Richard Perniciaro, vice president of planning, research, facilities and executive support for Atlantic Cape Community College.

He's the go-to guy for economic forecasts for Cape May and Atlantic counties. Perniciaro predicts a strong

tourist season for 2016, but offers little hope for new jobs or well paying positions for Cape May County residents. He said 2015 seemed to be a very good year for the tourism industry.

"I think we're headed for probably the lowest price for gasoline that you're going to see for a generation," said Perniciaro.

Cape May County is running out of capacity to house visitors.

-Richard Perniciaro, VP, Atlantic Cape Community College

Sunny weather, after June this summer, also helped the tourist season. He said tourism has been building since the recession and there was

no reason it would not continue to trend upward.

"The recession is over for the most part except for Cape May and Cumberland counties, probably the two worst in New Jersey," said Perniciaro. "I don't see that changing for the longer term."

Perniciaro said Cape May County is running out of capacity to house visitors, especially in Cape May.

"They don't build hotels anymore for the most part; Stone Harbor built a little one, that's about it," he said.

Shoulder seasons have improved including Christmastime and birding weekends, said

Perniciaro.

"The issue really is in the summer ... on a weekend and for a couple of weeks in the middle there's nowhere to put any more people," he said.

Visitors may be spending more money than in the past, said Perniciaro. Cheap gasoline may have encouraged day trippers from further away to drive to this area, he said.

He said to have space to accommodate more visitors, dredging back bays to build up more land on the bayside may be helpful to create

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Tourism is using regional method for its marketing

More than one city or county; idea showcases a variety of attractions

By ERIC AVEDESIAN
Cape May Star and Wave

Basking on sunny beaches, frolicking in the surf, sampling local delicacies at oyster bars or vineyards, and exploring the multitude of boardwalk amusements are some activities awaiting visitors to the New Jersey shore.

For generations, resorts in Atlantic and Cape May counties attracted families and vacationers from across the region and the world.

Tourism professionals want to retain those loyal customers while attracting new ones in 2016.

With fierce competition from other states vying for the tourist dollars, offering economical accommodations and offerings has challenged Atlantic and Cape May counties to work together.

Promoting the southern New Jersey shore effectively means expanding attractions from the usual beach and boardwalk to showcasing natural wonders, recreational opportunities and

even locally produced food and beverages.

Record-breaking revenues

Diane Wieland, Cape May County Tourism Department Director, said the county is concentrating on promoting Cape May County to new markets.

Cape May County, with its year-round population of 95,000, attracts upwards of 850,000 visitors every summer. Most of these visitors come from New Jersey and the Philadelphia areas, with a good mix of Canadian tourists thrown in.

According to the Cape May County Department of Tourism's mid-summer report released in August, occupancy in the county's accommodations is up with strong weekends in June and July. Traffic counts on the Garden State Parkway

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David Nahan/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Construction is progressing well on the new southbound span of the Garden State Parkway bridge over Great Egg Harbor and Drag Channel. Once the span is complete, southbound traffic will go onto this new span and northbound parkway traffic will switch over to the old southbound span while the northbound span is re-decked. After that, the old southbound span will be demolished.

Parkway bridge to be finished in 2016

By ERIC AVEDESIAN
Cape May Star and Wave

The new span of the Great Egg Harbor Bridge takes shape, a skeleton of concrete and steel straddling Great Egg Harbor and linking Cape May and Atlantic counties.

The 1.47-mile bridge, part of the Garden State Parkway, is undergoing a \$230 million makeover, which began in

May 2013, and is expected to conclude in June 2016.

Route 52 Constructors, the contractor hired by the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, is constructing a new 3,840-foot bridge over Great Egg Harbor Bay and a new 800-foot bridge over Drag Channel.

The Great Egg Harbor Bridge consists of two spans: the southbound span opened in 1955, while the northbound span opened in 1973.

Work on the Great Egg Harbor Bridge includes constructing a new parallel span west of the southbound span. Southbound traffic will be shifted onto the new southbound bridge. Northbound traffic will be temporarily shifted onto the southbound bridge while the existing northbound span is re-decked. Following the northbound span's re-decking, the

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Real estate ups, downs: Tale of islands vs. mainland towns

'It's a great time for investors. It's a great time for people who are just buying into the market. There's a lot of opportunities for a first-time buyer or people trying to buy up. There's also opportunities for people who are investors that buy a fixer upper and then they rehab it and flip it. That's helping our economy and our market.'

-Jeannine Wescoat, A.C. & County Board of Realtors

By KRISTEN KELLEHER
Cape May Star and Wave

In Atlantic and Cape May counties, a bridge and the span of a few miles can divide completely different real estate markets.

The allure of beachfront living and lazy days by the shore has kept the island markets healthy, while the area's challenges - unemployment rates higher than the state average in both counties and Atlantic City's struggling

economy - hindered the real estate markets in the less seasonal, mainland communities.

There were bright spots in both counties in 2015.

According to Jeannine Wescoat, board president of the Atlantic City & County Board of Realtors, Atlantic County saw increases in home sales and particularly strong third quarter sales in 2015.

According to New Jersey Realtors data, as of November, closed sales for

single-family homes in Atlantic County were up 15.5 percent, to 2,083 from 1,804, year to date from November 2014. The closed sales of townhomes/condos were up 25.3 percent, 733 from 585, and adult community closed sales were up 16.1 percent, 159 from 137.

Despite the increase in sales, the median sales price of homes decreased slightly across the board, and the average number of days on the market

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