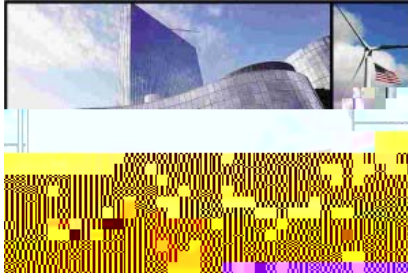


Eleven reasons why South Jersey residents can be optimistic about 2011



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By ELAINE ROSE, Staff Writer |

After a stagnant year of recession woes and delayed projects, 2011 has the makings of a comeback year for South Jersey.

Everything from pending legislation that may create a state-run tourism district in Atlantic City to the renovation and reopening of Millville's landmark Levoy Theatre to the expansion of The Walk retail outlets in Atlantic City gives area residents, business owners and government officials reason to believe 2011 will be a vast improvement over 2010.

Atlantic City, the region's tourism and employment hub, may be the catalyst for optimism in 2011, particularly with the Revel casino project.

Nearly everyone with a stake in Atlantic City - from residents to casino employees to government agencies - is hoping that Revel will receive the financing it needs to complete construction and eventually open its doors, said Joe Weinert, senior vice president of Spectrum Gaming Group.

"Atlantic City needs a big win. It's been four years of largely negative headlines for the industry," Weinert said. "For economic and psychological reasons, it needs a big win."

A couple of "boutique" casino hotels would be another victory for the resort and the entire area, said Weinert, mentioning pending casino legislation that would allow the opening of two casino-hotels with a minimum of 200 rooms.

Proprietors could include Hard Rock, which has said it will build in Atlantic City if Gov. Chris Christie signs off on the smaller casinos.

Atlantic City has lost a great deal of gamblers to competition from neighboring states, and it has to reach out to new customers to be profitable, said Weinert, adding that the resort would do well to pattern itself after Las Vegas, where 60 percent of the revenue on the Strip is from activities other than gambling.

The resort's nongaming revenue continues to grow, showing that "if you have the right nongaming products, people will drive past their local casinos and come to Atlantic City," Weinert said. "As the casino industry goes, so goes Atlantic County and most of southern New Jersey."

Atlantic City isn't the only place to look for growth in 2011.

Richard Stockton College in Galloway Township would contribute to the potential boom with a 154,000-square-foot campus center scheduled to open in the spring. The center will be a "one-stop shopping center" for students, containing the registrar's and bursar's offices, or create about 2,000 jobs when it opens in 2012.

These projects will give area residents a renewed spirit and hope for new jobs, and business people will begin to see that "things are turning around and (southern New Jersey) is the place to invest, Schulman said.

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