

Atlantic City Arts Foundation with Kate O'Malley

Transcript

J: Hello and welcome to Meet AC's newest podcast series, Atlantic City Voices. I'm Jessica Kucinich, 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, Kate O'Malley, operations manager for the Atlantic City Arts Foundation.

K: Hi, Kate. Welcome.

J: Welcome, Kate.

KM: Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

K: Of course, Kate, can you tell our listeners a little more about the Atlantic City Arts Foundation and its mission?

KM: Sure. So we are a 501c3 nonprofit organization seeking to enrich the lives of residents of and visitors to Atlantic City through diverse arts programs. Most of our programs focus on public art to effectively engage our community.

J: Beautification projects are necessary for every destination and its environment to thrive. So why and how was the 48 blocks mural program created?

KM: So, 48 Blocks is our flagship program. That program itself originated from the idea of celebrating arts and culture across all 48 blocks of Atlantic City and the entire community was invited to come up with creative projects that they wanted to do in their own neighborhood. And the options were really limitless. And some of those projects from the very, very first years were, in fact, murals or mural projects like a Painted Lifeguard boat, there was a small mural that was created in Bungalow Park. And then from there, the idea of implementing an official mural program kind of was born, and the idea of putting a spotlight on Atlantic City as a place to come for the arts by creating these really, really impressive large scale murals and bringing in artists that were internationally acclaimed to really put the world's attention on Atlantic City and bring something that was very, very impressive. And so from there, the Mural Arts Program was born. And mural, we had started as kind of like a kickoff to the actual 48 Blocks AC Festival. And from that beginning to now, we now have about 75 murals throughout Atlantic City, which is crazy to think about.

J: That's amazing. And, you know, the murals have really transformed and diversified the destination over the years.

K: Stories behind the artist's work are as moving as the murals they create. How do you choose the artists for each mural that is created?

KM: So when we first started the program, it was more of bringing in these really, really impressive artists, artists that had a lot of different styles, a lot of different messaging in their artwork that would kind of tie in to the Atlantic City landscape. And as the program has grown, you know, first we were kind of begging folks to allow us to paint murals on their property. And now so many people have come saying like, you know, realizing the value of it and saying, I really, really would love a mural on my business, on my house, you know, in my neighborhood. And so it's become more of like a twofold. So sometimes artists, you know, have an open application and they'll come and say, I don't care where this mural goes. I really, really want to do this concept and we'll find a place to put it. Or sometimes we have the wall first and we put the message out, you know, this wall is here. This is the area that it's in. And then an artist will create a concept based on where in the city the mural is being placed. But the projects are really, really up to the artists. And the way that we choose the artists and all of our public art pieces nowadays is we'll create different panels of community members that can vote on the art pieces that will go into their own community depending on what the project is.

K: That's a great way to bring everyone in the city together.

J: Now, are some of the artists paid or are they do they do the murals complimentary?

KM: Oh the artists are always paid. In the beginning, a lot of it was volunteer work just when we were starting out very grassroots, trying to prove that like art was something that could really impact the city in a positive way. But we have really, really grown since our beginning, and every single artist that we work with is paid.

J: That's wonderful. And how many local artists do you think you've worked with over the years?

KM: I would say, I mean, this year alone, we have worked with a little over 80 artists in our program, some of them being repeats. And I would say at least half of them are Atlantic City artists or, you know, that are kind of like neighboring towns. So I would say, like, we always aim for at least like a third of our artists to be specifically Atlantic City artists and local artists. And that's an initiative that we're really, really trying to put to the forefront of all of our programs now.

J: Absolutely. I think that's great as they know the destination best. And so how do these artists decide what they want to do with their blank canvas?

KM: The artists are really, really different. I've noticed this a lot. There's a lot of different ways to tackle a wall. Some artists will just have an idea, like something that they're specifically good at painting their style, their themes, and they really would like to do it in the large scale. Some people spend a long time researching a certain concept that ties into the area that they're in, and they'll choose that as their they're their piece. But it really it really varies person to person. And I think it takes a really incredible amount of skill to be able to take an idea and bring it to the large scale like that. And folks have done it via projection. People have done a grid system. Some people just straight freehand it, which I think is so crazy based on like a little sketch that they keep in their hand.

K: But it really is a person to person type of mythology that's really the artist's own personal style and the way that their brain is wired. But I was on the Atlantic City Arts Foundation website, Atlantic City

Arts Foundation.org, and it's very comprehensive with a lot of information on programs, events, public art, joining and supporting the Arts Foundation. Could you tell us a little bit more about some of the programs, including Art Terriers, Chalk about AC mural writing and anything else you want to discuss?

KM: Sure. So we have three main programs that run throughout the year. So what we were just talking about with the murals is part of 48 blocks AC, which is our summer program to talk about Atlantic City, which is our oldest program. That is a chalk art event where we distribute chalk packs throughout the city. We hire artists to do art throughout the city. And then it's a really great opportunity for the community to get out and create art. And everybody's an artist for the day. It was started as a way to combat kind of like the negative stereotypes surrounding Atlantic City and to spread positive messages and pride in our city and to really beautify the area and bring everybody together artists, residents, visitors. And then Arteriorsis a project that's themed around transition and transformation. So we'll take a vacant space in Atlantic City. We'll bring in a group of artists. It's almost like a reality TV show. We'll bring in a group of artists, and they'll have just two weeks to completely transform it into an immersive pop up art installation. And we've done this eight times now. The last one we did was in a three story home, and we actually included the work of 21 artists in the space. So that'll be taking place. It usually runs in either fall or spring, sometimes both, depending on how many spaces we can get for that year. But we've done that all over the city and it's a great way to one. Give the artists a really unique canvas. You know, it's not something that's just a wall. It's not something that's going to hang in a gallery. It's a full room to do whatever you want to creatively make and create an experience for folks that are walking into it, really to feel like they're going somewhere else. And it's also a great way to bring the community and bring residents and bring visitors, bring people into a spot of Atlantic City that they wouldn't normally go, you know, bring people off the boardwalk, out of the casinos, into an area that maybe they haven't heard of before or maybe has a bad rap and experience something really, really unique that sticks with you. And a lot of the times when we go into these vacant spaces, there about to become something else. So after our exhibit is done and the artists leave will take out, you know, whatever the artists want to take with them. And then that place will become whatever it's going to become. And it's kind of a cool way to almost like advertise that something new is coming. You know, here is this really, really incredible art installation that is, you know, this place was completely transformed and now it's about to transform again. So I really, really enjoy that about our two.

J: Yeah. I had an opportunity to visit last fall, the Arteriorsis home, and I was just fascinated by the transformation and art that was displayed throughout. Like you said, it wasn't just a mirror on the wall, it was almost 3D effects and the lighting and the different pieces that these artists use. I was I was just wowed by it because I didn't expect that going into this this home.

KM: Yeah. And it really is. It's all the artists. You know, people have such creative minds and it's really just mind blowing to see what they can do. You know, you show them a kitchen and suddenly it's this, like, crazy, like immersive. There's like lights and smoke machines and plants coming out of everywhere. And it's just really, really cool to watch. And it's a great kind of bonding experience for the artist as well, since all of our programs are public art space. There's not necessarily, like, many opportunities for people to kind of like come together and create close to each other for, you know, a period of time. So it creates a lot of great connections between the artists and they can kind of bounce off of one another's creativity and one another's styles and a lot of great collaboration have resulted from that as well, which is super cool.

J: And there was 750 visitors that went through this.

KM: Yeah, yeah. We had it open for about a month. We actually extended it to the end of November due to popular demand and so many people had come through.

J: How can the local community or groups get more involved?

KM: So we have a couple of different opportunities for folks that are looking to get involved. If you are an artist, we have an artist database you can sign up for on our website and that will keep you up to date. We send out emails every single time there's a paid opportunity for a local artist that's either from us or anyone else that's in the area that's like, Hey, you know, I'm looking to hire an artist for X, Y, Z thing. We'll send that out so folks can get updated. Artists can always be, you know, with their finger on the pulse for where they can go for opportunities. And then also we have a volunteer sign up. So folks that are interested in helping us with events and volunteering to help with things like mural prep or chalk packing or things like that, you can also sign up to be a volunteer on our website. We have a newsletter that goes out about every month that you can also sign up for on our website. That'll keep you up to date on everything that we're doing over at the Arts Foundation. And yeah, we have we have a lot of open community events. It's a good way to kind of stay informed and you can come out and create Smart with us and experience some really cool things.

J: Yeah, and Meet AC loves to partner with the Art Foundation utilizing a jitney to tour for groups looking to look at the mural tours.

Yeah, absolutely. And we really enjoy giving the Jitney mural tours. That's something that we had started doing during when the murals were first coming up doing the tours to different art experiences. And it's something that Meet AC has definitely taken a hold of and we love giving tours for you guys. We also do walking tours, biking tours. So anybody that's interested in doing mural tours for their group or maybe for like a business retreat, that is also something that we offer.

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

Km: Oh, that might be the hardest question you ask. So many great ones. I would have to say, especially like on a dreary day, like this, like in the winter, I really love going Com Ga Ninh Kieu for a big bowl of Pho. We actually have a really big chicken painted on it called Gar by Mark Chew and I love that restaurant. I also really, really love Mexico for their happy hour every single day. And I would really, really say my top restaurant of all is Setaara Over in Duck Town, it's a French Afghan restaurant. It's absolute gorgeous. Inside, it feels like you're stepping into a completely different place. And the food is so good and the family that owns it is super sweet. So I would have to say those three.

K: Those are definitely some hidden gems and local favorites in Atlantic City, I would have to say.

J: We're very excited for Setaara transformation of their outdoor space.

KM: Yes, I've been watching it like so excitedly.

J: Kate, thank you so much for being a guest on Atlantic City Voices. We look forward to continuing our relationship with the Atlantic City Arts Foundation and helping promote the thriving arts scene in Atlantic City.

KM: Thank you so much for having me.

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