

ACUA Leading the Way in Renewable Energy with President Rick Dovey

Transcript

J: Hello and welcome to Meet AC 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, Rick Dovey, president of President of Atlantic County Utilities Authority.

K: Hi, Rick. Welcome.

J: Welcome, Rick.

R: Hello. Glad to be here.

K: Thanks, Rick. Can you tell our listeners more about yourself on your journey with the ACUA?

R: Sure. So, I've been the president of the ACUA for 32 years. Started in the middle of the summer in 1990. So, it's been a long and eventful and very productive and rewarding time at the ACUA as the President. I previously worked at the ACUA in the early 1980s for two years, and in the interim period between 82 and 1990, I was the department head of Planning and Economic Development for Atlantic County. And so, I've had a long experience in environmental infrastructure and solid waste and wastewater. So, it's been a great experience. I went to school at Stockton, now University, and majored in Environmental Studies and Urban Studies in planning. So, I've been able to really find my place and career and make a big impact for the positive parts of Atlantic County.

K: Now, you also have strong ties to the local destination with going to Stockton, and you were the chairman for sustainable Jersey, correct?

R: Yes. So, I served in a number of different organizations and leadership spots and membership. In Sustainable Jersey is a statewide program that encourages municipalities and school districts to have green teams and implement green initiatives and practices. And it's been really very successful in being a part of that leadership has been very rewarding and we've made a lot of progress throughout the state. But here in Atlantic City and South Jersey and even Atlantic City.

K: Some of the sustainability commitments that you have are native plant and rain gardens, a seawall in Atlantic City, and a wildlife commitment.

R: Yeah, the authority. The ACUA is really involved with community groups and municipalities and other government agencies and supporting initiatives that are sustainable. And those include community gardens, both at churches and places of worship, at schools and other locations throughout Atlantic County. And also, we support important projects like the New Jersey Food Bank here in South Jersey and participate in and a number of community activities and support throughout Atlantic County.

J: What an extensive and experiential journey you've had in this industry so far? Can you explain issue ACUA's mission and the variety of projects that the plant works on?

R: Sure. Well, we have two. The ACUA has two primary functions, one is we run the wastewater treatment plant, the sewage plant that serves the eastern part of Atlantic County, including Atlantic City and barrier islands in the suburbs. And we've been operating that since 1978, it's a very well-run facility, and it's the most significant thing related to tourism and visitors is that the water around Atlantic City, in Atlantic County has been totally clean since 1978, since we came out. So, we no longer have pollution issues in our bays, back, back bays and rivers and inlets and the ocean, largely because of the success of our wastewater treatment, our facility that serves this county. So that's a big plus. And nothing is more important to our tourism industry than the quality of our water in the bays and oceans that surround us. The other function is solid waste management and we started working on that, that responsibility in the 1980s and so, we replaced literally dozens of old dumps that were polluting groundwater through over throughout Atlantic County. And now there are no longer any dumps and old landfills that are polluting. And we implemented recycling countywide door, door to door recycling some 30 years ago. And it's one of the most successful recycling programs in the country. We've been cited and received awards for the comprehensive way that we deal with our waste management that is paid off again by having very clean water, drinking water and surface water throughout Atlantic County.

J: I had the opportunity to tour the facility last summer with a group of journalists, and I was so captivated and really impressed by the variety of processes that the plant goes through to provide this type of clean water for our surrounding communities.

R: Yeah, you can take it for granted because it's been in place for so long and been successful. But if you travel anywhere else where there are serious pollution issues or drinking water pollution, you know the difference. So, our plant processes about 30 million gallons a day of wastewater and cleans it up and then returns it to safely to the environment with little impact. What we've tried to do at both the solid waste facilities and the wastewater plant sewer plant in Atlantic City is also incorporate processes that are green and renew and utilize renewable and alternative technologies that improve our efficiency, but most importantly, protect the environment and reduce our greenhouse emissions from our operations. So, of course, our wind farm located at the sewer plant in Atlantic City is the best known because it's so visible. But we have literally a dozen or so processes that we've implemented throughout our system solar projects, renewable natural gas, landfill gas being utilized to make electricity, any number of things, utilizing electric vehicles and throughout our fleet and minimizing our impact on the up on the climate and air emissions.

J: The ACUA also plays a vital role in Atlantic City's energy efficiency efforts, and in Atlantic City, we're committed to maintaining the natural resources that make our destination so beloved and unique. And like you said, sometimes we take that for granted. Could you tell us about the infamous Jersey Atlantic wind farm that you just mentioned?

R: Well, it's still the only wind farm in New Jersey, and it's the closest wind farm to the coast anywhere on the East Coast. So, it's now 17 years in operation. It seems like just yesterday it began, and it is a leading reason that the acceptance of offshore wind as an alternative and acceptable technology is big because we've had a wind farm here. It's known throughout the world. We've literally had thousands and thousands of visitors over the last 17 years. Actually, close to 50,000 visitors have visited the wind farm from throughout the world to see that and of course, our solar facilities. And one of the things that our projects have initiated that is also sort of unseen but is how many other organizations and government agencies have in private sector have embraced renewable energy since our project came online 17 years ago. So, for instance, the Atlantic City Convention Center installed really I think about 15 years ago, the first large scale renewable solar energy on top of the of the convention center. And it was probably one of the first convention centers in the United States to do so. And they really set the stage for that. And there have been numerous other green initiatives by the private sector, the public sector in in Atlantic City and around Atlantic City as a result of that. So, they're good, good leaders. The Convention Visitors Bureau, the CRDA have renewable up. They have electric charging stations located in their parking garage and there are more to be implemented over the next year or so.

J: Absolutely. We're so proud of our green and sustainable initiatives that we implement here at the Atlantic City Convention Center and throughout Atlantic City, as we think it's so vital to help regenerate our communities and destination. Can you talk more about the tours that the facility offers?

R: Well, during the summertime, we have open every Wednesday. At noon time, we have open tours, meaning nobody people can just show up at the wastewater plant and get a tour and an explanation and information of the wind farm of our solar facility. And of course, we teach them about wastewater treatment when they're there. So, every Wednesday in the summer, for the last three or four years, even during the pandemic, it would be outside. So, we've had tours of families come, groups come on Wednesdays, open every during the summer. And then throughout the year we literally have thousands of school groups, scout groups, college students and classes, conventions, the convention and visitors Authority have also been worked closely with the ACUA to arrange for conventions that relate to renewable energy or environmental infrastructure, to have side tours to the ACUA, wind farm and that that again, thousands of tours have been taken over time and people, you know, coming to a wind farm directly and literally underneath of a wind turbine is a very eye opening experience. So people can actually experience it firsthand as opposed to what they may see or hear about and not actually experience it themselves. So about 99% of the people that visit us leave saying, boy, this is a technology that makes some sense. I'm very comfortable with this and I'm glad to see it's being implemented. It makes financial and economic and environmental sense.

J: And the wind farm power is approximately 2600 homes throughout Atlantic City, is that correct?

R: It powers enough for 2600 homes. It doesn't necessarily go to only two homes in in it goes into the grid and then said, as part of the overall electric generation for this area, but at the wastewater plant, we utilize it in the course of the year. It provides about 60% of our power to run the sewer plant and sewer plants use a lot of electricity more than most people might think. And that provides a economic benefit, a dollar, a benefit to the ACUA and its ratepayers for about a half a million dollars a year.

K: Now you mentioned about educate the local community and groups through the tours. How can they get more involved with the ACUA?

R: Well, they can go to our website at acua.com and there is a on their there's a button to go to where you can arrange for tours and a staff person will contact anybody that signs up or indicates they want to have a tour. We'll arrange it pretty much any time during the week, sometimes on the weekends.

J: So, 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?

R: Well, Dock's Oyster House just recently was there. It's one of our, my wife and I favorite places. Steve & Cookie's is in Margate but it's on Absecon Island that's another favorite. And there are a number of restaurants in casinos that that that we like. And it's really not a third one that I can specify, but there's probably 15/3 ones.

J: We agree with the culinary scene in Atlantic City is just thriving and dock's oyster house there. Happy hour is one not to miss but get there early.

R: Oh, absolutely. It's special they of course, they did an expansion and just a couple of years ago. And so there's it's really a special place.

K: And we definitely include our friends in Margate, when we talk about Atlantic City, we take clients, too Steven Cookie's, Tomato's, Johnny's. Like you said, it's on up Absecon Island and it's all very

R: Yeah. For any visitor, you're in the same location and when you're on Absecon Island or even the surrounding towns.

K: Rick, thank you so much for being a guest on Atlantic City Voices. We look forward to continuing the conversation on sustainability and supporting ACUA's efforts within the destination.

R: Thank you, guys. Appreciate being asked to participate today.

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