**MudGirlsStudios with Dorrie Papademetriou**

Transcript

J: Hello and welcome to Meet AC’s 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 discussed 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 guests, Dorrie Papademetriou, founder, and designer from Mud Girl Studios.

K: Hi, Dori. Welcome.

J: Welcome, Dori.

D: Hi. Thank you so much. I'm happy to be here.

K: Thank you for being on with us. Can you tell us more about your journey that led you to the creation of My Girls Studios?

Yes. Well, I always having been a creative person, I come from a graphic design background and basically have always been a maker of things that is from gardening to painting to woodworking. And I really fell in love with the medium of clay. So, making, I believe, brings joy and peace through creativity and being able to express yourself and create something outside of yourself. So, I just wanted to share that and share that joy with others who may not have been able to have that same experience. Making can also be transformative, which means it takes you to another place that moves you beyond right. And so how can we use creating? How can we use making to transform people? Transform the clay, of course. And then and then really affect effects, social change. And so that was kind of the idea behind Mud Girls.

J: I love that art tells so many different, unique story. So, I love how you always hit on the point that art is transformative. The mission and story of My Girl series are so inspiring, and I particularly love the motto Making Hope Out of Clay. Can you tell us more about how you are a safe space for the women and how they look up to you as a mentor in their lives?

D: Sure. Well, Mud Girls Studios is a nonprofit social enterprise here in Atlantic City. And what we do is we work with women in poverty. So that means women who have been out of the workforce for a while, who have been unemployed, basically, sometimes having been homeless, sometimes having had addiction, sometimes physically. Unfortunately, being trafficked. And our space is a space where you where these women come to become a part of community, to work in the clay medium and make beautiful pottery, but also create themselves and a pathway to perhaps another level of employment. So, working with us builds confidence, builds teamwork, and just giving the women a second chance to rebuild and remake their lives.

K: So, you're also building self-sufficiency for these girls. And regarding the ceramics and design work. Can you briefly explain the skills of ceramic making and how you determine the designs you and the girls create?

D: Sure. Well, you know, we are a team here at the studio, and that means that we all participate in sort of every level of the pottery being made, whether it's wedging the clay and forming the pieces or glazing the pieces. We all have a say in what happens. The designs we feel are contemporary and clean. A lot of them have surface design, which is then impressed into the clay that is representative of a number of it being a lot of what we do and have natural elements and geometric patterns kind of just clean contemporary design. But we also design with everyone in mind in the fact that everyone can participate. Everyone that comes to the studio will be able to find success in the work that they create. And I think that's really important to be able to be proud of your work. That's also why we really emphasize making quality pieces, because we know we're worthy. And I know that these women are worthy of doing great work. And so we we do our best. That's something that is is always a focus of our daily activity is quality control. We want to do the best we possibly can. So that is a little bit about the design thing. We certainly, you know, have difference of opinions. I have a certain color palette that I really enjoy and sometimes will. So throw something new into the mix. Someone will say, you know, let's try something different and and we give it a shot. And then we all kind of contribute in and decide which way to go with it. Is it. Is it a thumbs up or thumbs down? You know?

K: Well, that's what teamwork is all about, you know, finding new ideas.

D: Exactly. And, you know, you know, sometimes you pull something out of the kiln and you say, hmm, that really works or that doesn't work. So it's all a part of the process. And it is certainly a process and a long process if that.

J: For every piece commissioned or sold helps a woman transform out of poverty, correct?

D: Yes. Well, here at the studio, the women make an hourly wage. So, yes, it's an employment program, essentially. So, you know, not only are we building each other, we're also hopefully building a little bit of income so that they are able to build themselves into self-sufficiency. I mean, we're also a bit of a transitional work program in that it's not full time for most of these women. So what it is, is that we give them a leg up, we give them a chance to build their skills and their communication skills, their social skills that then will spur them on to perhaps another level of employment, perhaps full employment. Some of our women end up going back to school. We're currently there. Some are working on their G.E.D. and then getting registered at the local community college and the universities in the area. So that's something that we try and help our women to do. Not only is it a source of income for them, but we provide some social service resources and group mentoring that builds them in sort of all aspects of their lives.

K: You recently celebrated five Years of Transforming Lives and had your first ever a fundraising celebration at Stockton University's Campus Theater. We'd like to congratulate you on that. And I know there was an incredible documentary shown. How moving was it to see all of your hard work and dedication to the studio and women be celebrated by the local community and also the businesses?

D: Wow. Well, it was you know, we hit the big screen. So that was very exciting for all of us. I think, you know, stellar being celebrated by your peers and by your community is incredibly empowering. I think we left there feeling extremely accomplished. And when you're recognized for the work you do, I think it just builds you so much. We were we were very proud of that evening and we were honored. We were so moved to have people want to share in our celebration, want to be a part of Mud Girls Studios. And, you know, that's really something that, you know, we are so thankful for, so grateful for. It's not only the women in this studio that, you know, are empowered, but it's every person who volunteers with us. It's every person who purchases a piece of our pottery that they themselves are transformed because now they're connecting with this powerful movement of of women building each other. And it's just a really beautiful circle, you know, unites the the end user, the person that purchases the piece with the maker. With us here in the studio. So we feel that everyone can be a part of Mud Girls Studios through either coming here or or purchasing a piece of our pottery. So we love telling our story. We believe in what we do. And it's beautiful to see that other people, the community believes in us, too.

J: That’s wonderful. And we love helping tell your story as well. I know you have partnered with Atlantic Care and Stockton University and some really incredible projects. Can you tell us more about these projects and if you have any more in the pipeline?

D: Sure. Well, yes, actually, we have a beautiful piece that's being installed currently actually has the building has not yet opened. It's the new Atlantic Care Medical Arts Pavilion on Ohio Avenue. And we have a beautiful piece that spans about 35 feet down a hallway. It is a series of blues and turquoise pieces and sand into ivory colors that it's really to represent the movement of the colors of the of the ocean. And it's really spectacular. We're really excited about that project. It was here in the studio. We worked on it for several months, but it will be soon to open in the new building there. The other project that we're working on is a new piece for Stockton University's Phase two residential building. That will be another kind of the motif will be based on the garden, which I'm sorry, the park, which is across the street from this new building. So to be abstracted botanical designs on the piece for Stockton. So we're really excited about that one, too. Those are the big projects that we have. And oh, there's another really great project happening with a new, wonderful bar and grill opening here in the city next to the Stockton Residential Housing Building. It is Good Dog Bar. We did a piece for Good Dog Bar and as soon as they're ready, that piece will be installed there as well. So you will see us all over the city, it seems.

K: We do. We see your work all over the place. And I'm sure that other local businesses and the community are wondering how can they get involved? How can they commission pieces? Can they volunteer? What can community members do with Mud Girls?

D: Okay. Well, we've done we've worked with a lot of businesses and local communities and other nonprofits. I would say that if businesses are interested in any of our tile work to adorn their their facilities, their headquarters, their offices, we'd be happy to consult with them and create as a custom piece just for them that that would be a wall wall design. But another way that we have worked with businesses in the area is by creating specific custom pieces for them, whether it's with their logo or whether it's award plaques or pieces for gifts for their employees. That's a really great project for us to work on. It also tells our stories of the more people that have our work in their hands and more our story gets told. So that's a really great way. We've done a number of favors for weddings or for parties, events, conferences and that kind of thing. So if if businesses like to commission us for something like that, actually, right now we're making hundreds of pieces for different luncheons and holiday events, so we're really excited about that. Actually, those are going all over the country to Milwaukee and Baltimore and Indiana, New York. So we do a lot of those custom pieces. And in the hundreds. So we'd love to help.

J: That's wonderful. And I know Meet AC has personally commissioned some beautiful pieces from yourself and the girls for clients and media, so we appreciate the continued partnership along with shopping your online store Mud Girl Studios .org. Can you tell us about any upcoming markets or festivals to purchase your one of a kind pieces at?

D: Sure, while we are every year we have a holiday open house or a holiday market. This year we are going to host our holiday event at Reeds Farm in Egg Harbor Township and that will be on December 3rd. It's usually a wonderful celebration of Mud Girls and the holidays. And also you get to shop some of our one of one of a kind pieces at at that holiday show. So we're really looking forward to that on December 3rd.

K: I love that show I actually attended last year and I picked up some beautiful gifts, one of a kind pieces. So I will definitely be there on December 3rd.

D: Okay. That’s wonderful. Thank you.

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?

D: Okay. So I would say there's a couple that the women here at the studio and I have been to. So those are really wonderful memories that I have with them. So I'm going to share those and one is the Back Bay Ale House. And I would also say that Tennessee Avenue Beer Hall and right across the street from the Stockton tile wall that we did is the Knife and Fork, which occasionally will go to their happy hour at the bar. So those are some some places that we really enjoy.

J: Those are some fantastic spots. And we couldn't agree more about Knife and Fork happy hour.

D: Yes, right. Right.

J: Dorie, thank you so much for being a guest on Atlantic City Voices. We look forward to continuing our relationship with Mod Girl Studios and helping promote the amazing work you and the women create.

D: Well, thank you so much. It's been a pleasure talking with you today. Thank you.

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