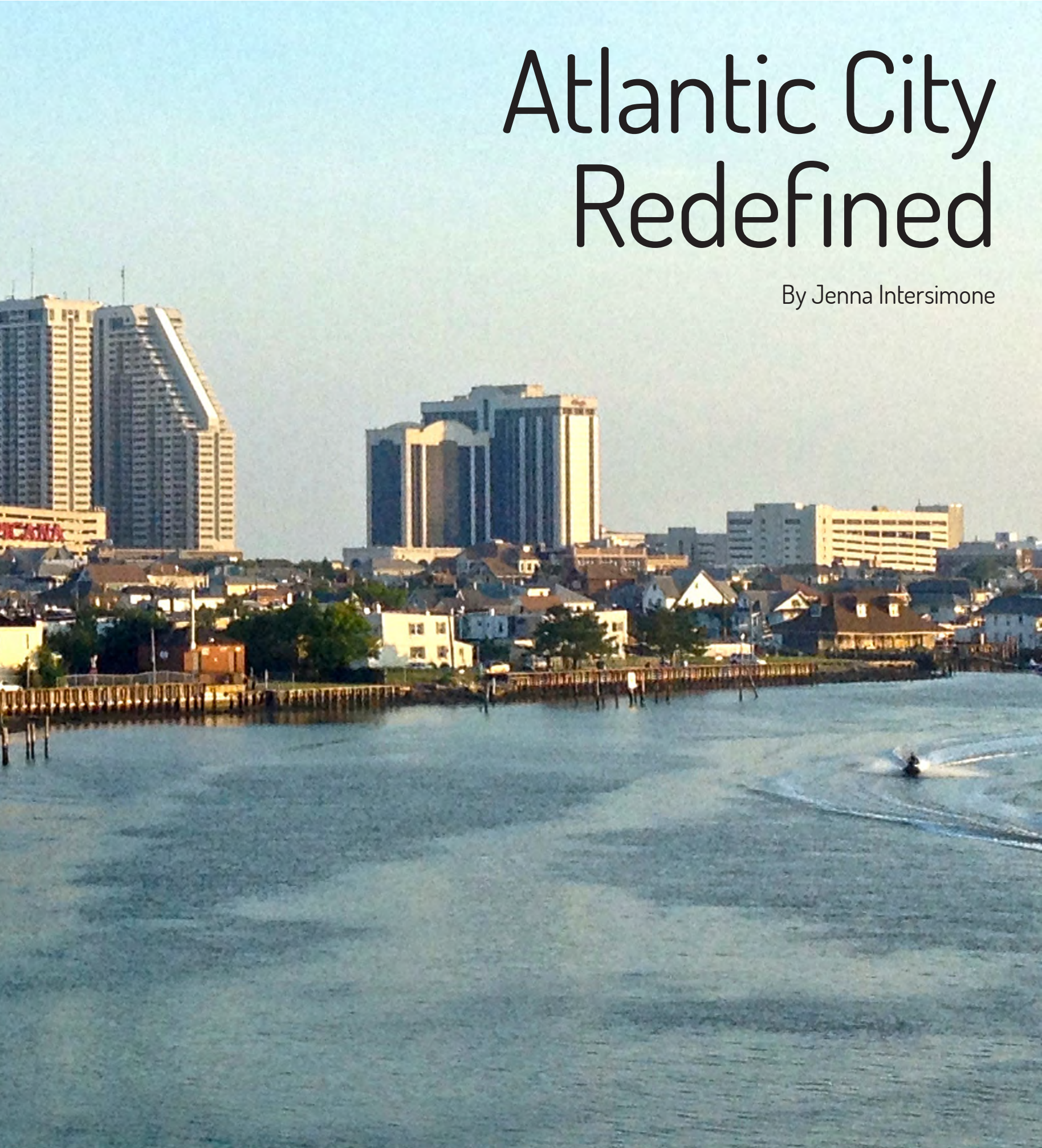




Atlantic City Redefined

By Jenna Intersimone



As I drive into Atlantic City on a bustling sunny Saturday afternoon, with the air heavy with the promise of short dresses and tall drinks, there is an invisible cloud that hangs above.

Although I know it lingers behind sad “cash for gold” signs, dark back alleys and mahogany boardrooms with hopeful sellers, I don’t immediately see it beneath the flashing lights and well-dressed people in the casinos.

Behind closed doors, the future of Atlantic City is uncertain. Within 18 months, four casinos in the legendary town have turned off their

last fluorescent light. Throughout the past eight years, profits have plunged by \$2.34 billion dollars, having started 2006 making \$5.2 billion, then cutting revenue almost in half.

I find this to be a sad story for the city that once ran the show against prohibition, where rules were negotiable and freedom was rampant during the 1920s. Gamblers and drinkers waved their hand to the conservative ruling and instead, threw around their glamour and glitz alongside their whiskey drinks and dancing women. Without the cloud of prohibition to ruin its weekends, Atlantic City quickly became “The World’s Playground.”

The golden days came to an unfortunate end around World War II and the city quickly became overrun by poverty, crime, unemployment and corruption. However, as the issues surrounding Atlantic City have become more prominent with the loss of jobs and industry, the city has only become more committed to launching a turnaround.

So what is to become of the iconic Jersey Shore destination? The future remains uncertain, but read on to find out what developers have in mind to bring Atlantic City into what they, and I, hope will be its greatest era yet.

The Tropicana, one of Atlantic City’s

most popular casinos, isn’t going down without a fight. A \$50 million upgrade has launched, which features jaw-dropping renovations and a state-of-the-art gym. Some of the older areas of the legendary casino have been redone and renovations are currently underway for the north tower’s 434 hotel rooms. Also, an open-to-the-public AtlantiCare LifeCenter fitness center is in the works; it will have half-a-million dollars of the best equipment available in the 12,455-square-foot space, including Cybex weight machines, a fully stocked cardio wing and two hardwood exercise studios designed with floating floors to limit stress on joints. The Tropicana is hoping that these upgrades will bring





Northeast clientele away from faraway destinations and back to Atlantic City, as happened in the city's glory days.

Big upgrades clearly aren't just reserved for big hotels; dazzling lights are coming to the boardwalk to make way for some glitz as well as practical public safety in the darkening city. The Casino Reinvestment Development Authority approved \$12.5 million in bonds to finance 164 new LED light poles that will not only add some sparkle, but will also illuminate some of the more ominous spots of the of the four-mile-long wooden promenade which have been left darkened after the closing of four casinos in the area. These high-tech light poles will include interactive and decorative features that will not only keep passing tourists safe, but will also serve as family-friendly entertainment, a new focus for the

city which has always been known as a gambling destination

Another big hotel in Atlantic City, The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, is also about to get some expensive updates. A new nightclub is coming to the glitzy hotel, as well as an outdoor entertainment venue, at a combined price tag of \$14 million. By teaming up with Live Nation, the Borgata plans on bringing top performers to the venue, Festival Park, which opened June 13 with a daylong music celebration. Some of the biggest DJs in the world as well as a series of Electric Dance Music parties will be found at the venue, another way of creating fun without the presence of gambling in the city -- which has experienced a huge loss of the once-formidable industry. Not that the partying is over yet; the Borgata's MIXX nightclub will be replaced by a new nightclub that will have a big-city, upscale feel created

by renowned New York architectural firm Josh Held Design, whose earlier projects include Marquee Nightclub in New York, TAO Restaurant and Nightclub in Las Vegas and Voyeur Nightclub in Los Angeles. The Borgata hopes that these high-end upgrades will bring guests looking for some dancing and drinks back to the city by the shore.

The beachfront area is getting a makeover of its own, as one of the tallest observation wheels in the country of its kind will soon be found there alongside some of the vintage features. A \$14 million 205-foot-tall observation wheel with 40 enclosed, climate-controlled cars and WiFi access is currently being built in Melara, Italy and should be delivered to Atlantic City by December. As one of the tallest attractions of its type in the United States, it will provide riders with a 15- to 20-minute panoramic view of

the Atlantic Ocean as well as the developing city skyline suspended atop a 30,000-square-foot expansion of Steel Pier. With views like that, why stay inside a stuffy casino?

Things definitely haven't been easy for Atlantic City. As the gambling industry has changed, the need for Atlantic City to change has evolved as well, and it has become obvious that there are simply too many casinos and that the market needs to correct itself and adjust to the actual number of gamblers who travel to betting centers.

Atlantic City is seeing that it needs some other attractions to keep families headed to the Shore spot, an effort they are pursuing with the above-mentioned renovations and changes to come. Only time will tell if these efforts come to fruition, transforming the city into a tourist destination known for more than just gambling.