

ATLANTIC COUNTY PRIMED FOR TAKEOFF IN 2024

By Michael Epifanio



This image shows the actual first NARTP building in the background with a rendering of the second building superimposed on its construction site. The NARTP campus is located in the Aviation District along with Atlantic City International Airport and the William J. Hughes Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township.

The start of a new year is always a terrific time to look ahead to the promise of the coming year while reflecting on the events that brought us to where we are today. Here in Atlantic County, our unique approach to economic development is gaining traction and there are visible signs of progress now and in the future.

To put this optimistic outlook in perspective, you must recall the challenges the county faced a decade ago.

2014 was far from a banner year for the county's economy. Four casinos closed that year and nearly 7,000 jobs were lost. Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson refused to sit idly by and took action to break from the economic status quo. That year, the county commissioned a nationally recognized independent consultant, Austin, Texas-based AngelouEconomics, to develop the Atlantic County Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan, which was completed in 2015.

At the root of that plan was the creation of a private non-profit development corporation to drive economic growth and cultivate economic diversity in Atlantic County. That entity, now known as the Atlantic County Economic Alliance (ACEA) was established and staffed in 2017.

The ACEA immediately got to work on that economic diversification by focusing on the aviation sector as the best opportunity to reduce the county's dependence on tourism. In 2019, the first of seven planned buildings in the National Aerospace Research and Technology Park (NARTP) opened for business adjacent to the Federal Aviation Administration's William J. Hughes Technical Center and the Atlantic City International Airport in Egg Harbor Township. Current tenants of the park's first building are conducting leading-edge research into novel uses of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and their integration into the National Airspace System and the field of Advanced Air Mobility that employs electric-powered aircraft that take off and land vertically.

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In October, the ACEA and NARTP held a groundbreaking ceremony to commemorate the start of construction for a second NARTP building, proving the county's strategy for economic growth is paying off. And there was more big news to come from the Aviation District – comprised of the airport, FAA Tech Center, and NARTP – this fall.

Also in October of 2023, Industrial Realty Group (IRG) of California signed a lease with the South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA) to develop 300+ acres in the northwest quadrant of Atlantic City International Airport (ACY). IRG-directed development is projected to create up to 3 million sq. ft. of mixed use and cargo-related space and potentially attract as many as 2,000 jobs. It was the ACEA that introduced IRG to the SJTA. Additionally, the ACEA is planning to develop a local aircraft training academy to bolster growth of the aviation industry in Atlantic County. A roadway planning study, funded by ACEA, is also underway to support planned development “inside the fence” at ACY.

A hotel and conference center has been announced by local developer Leo Schoffer, who plans to build a four-story, 111-room hotel adjacent to the Aviation District. The project includes restaurants, a 24,200 sq. ft. convention center, and two more hotels in later phases.

To provide trained employees for future development, the Atlantic County Institute of Technology (ACIT) is constructing

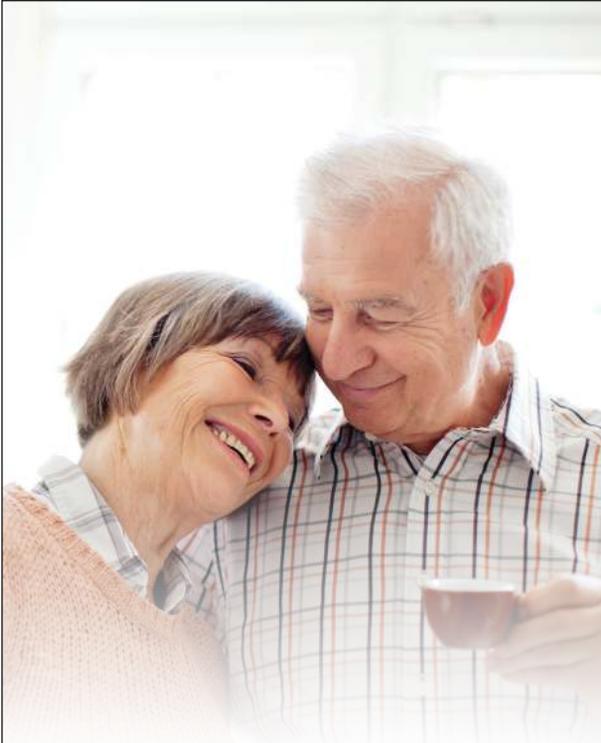
a \$53 million, 133,000-square-foot Career and Technical Building on its Mays Landing campus to support the aviation industry. The new building will house the expanded Academy of Aviation Studies and other technical programs. The Academy of Aviation Studies is fully articulated to the Atlantic Cape Community College Aviation Studies program so that students may continue to earn a pilot certification or associate degree.

“The ACEA is having a positive impact on our economy by attracting aviation-related businesses to our county while supporting businesses from other sectors as well,” said ACEA Board Chair, Brett Matik of Linwood. “No matter what your company does, the ACEA acts as your concierge, helping businesses secure financing and resources, train workers, select sites, and resolve permitting issues, among other benefits.”

ACEA Board Vice Chair, Michael J. Viscount, Jr., also of Linwood, concurs that the ACEA's efforts to diversify the regional economy are bearing fruit.

“After so many years of stagnation, our county's economy is on the brink of a transformation that will provide opportunities for decades to come,” said Viscount. “Between the growth of the Aviation District and the ACEA's other business attraction efforts, Atlantic County's residents can take stock in our motto, ‘live at the shore and work on the future.’”

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