

## Alumni Voices – LIGHTs On Winter 2023

### Alyssa Larsen '19

**Sarah Grady (SG):** Hello! My name is Sarah Grady. I'm. The Assistant Director of the Lloyd D. Levinson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism here at Stockton University. We call ourselves LIGHT for short. Today I am joined by an alumnus, Alyssa Larsen, who will be telling us a little bit about her experience in the hospitality and tourism industry. Thank you so much, Alyssa, for joining us today.

**Alyssa Larsen (AL):** Hi, Sarah, thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be with you guys this afternoon to share a little bit about my experience with the Stockton community.

**SG:** Excellent. Thank you so much. So, our first question of the interview is, **could you tell us a little about yourself and your experience in the industry?**

**AL:** Absolutely. I am from Edison, New Jersey. I studied at Middlesex County College my first year, and I studied in their hospitality program. From there I transferred to Stockton University, where I also studied hospitality and tourism management. I graduated in the spring of 2019.

I really like the South Jersey area, and I fell in love with Atlantic City and everything like that. So, I decided to stay. I've had a lot of experience throughout the years, primarily in food and beverage. I've done everything from working in Friendly's and Red Robin to American Cruise Lines where I did my internship as a server and housekeeper.

My management experience is primarily in events, and food and beverage, and currently, I am employed at Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, in their Banqueting Operations Department. I've been there for a little under 3 years. It's a great company, and I'm, you know, really lucky to be there.

**SG:** It sounds like quite a quite a career, even so early. **Could you describe a current challenge or an experience that you've been through recently?**

**AL:** Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, in hospitality, obviously, there's challenges every day, some smaller than others, but when I think of Atlantic City and casinos, I guess I think of the challenge of ensuring customer loyalty. Right?

So, there's nine casinos there's no secret that these guests have options, and there's competition. And primarily all the casinos are kind of offering the same thing – lodging, food, and beverage, gaming, entertainment. So, it's really about making us stand out, making sure that the guests have the same experience every time they come. Consistency is important, but it's also about making sure that they, you know, have something new every time they come as well, right trying a new cocktail, or a new restaurant, or a new show and just keeping their experience fresh and being as innovative as possible.

We want them leaving our doors and excited to come back, and we want them leaving and wanting to tell all their friends that they want to come back to Hard Rock specifically, and we

just want to make sure that we give the best experience to them to make sure that they're coming on our property next time. And it's difficult like I said, with all the other casinos.

**SG:** Competition is fierce in this market, even just within the market, let alone outside of it with New Jersey, adjacent to Pennsylvania and New York, and all of those other businesses as well.

**How do you feel that your experience at Stockton prepared you for this challenge for this experience?**

**AL:** Yeah, that's a great question. You know, in the hospitality program specifically at Stockton, they really encourage you to think outside of the box – try new things. It's okay to fail. You got to fail to see what works.

Hospitality is not black and white. It's about being creative, and you know, just thinking outside the box and doing things outside the norm.

Even when it came to looking for internships or projects, or anything like that, we really always were encouraged to just give it a shot. See if it sticks. And that's really important, when I'm at work, and I'm thinking of things just to try. I'm reminded that it's okay to try things and fail and see what works. And the only way you're going to get better is by trying new things and that's what's going to separate us and set us apart from the competition.

**SG:** Great observation. Certainly, the idea that you can adapt, and you can, you know, not ad lib. But you can try to be creative. Different approaches to things.

And that leads us to the fourth question. **Do you have any advice for people that are seeking a career in the industry, or someone that's trying to follow in your path of banquet services at a casino?**

**AL:** Sure. So, everybody's post-grad job search looks different. A lot of people have internships lined up, and that sets them up. But I would just say, overall, for anybody – Just keep your mind open. The last thing I wanted to do was work in food and beverage in a casino. I was not interested in the hours, the chaos, any of it. I was like, 'that's the last thing I want to do.'

Whether I liked it or not, food and beverage was kind of just always on my back, and I'm happier than I ever thought I would be in this role. So, I'll just say, get creative with your job searches. You know the hospitality industry stretches far beyond dining rooms and kitchens and hotels. There's something for everybody. So, just keep your mind open. Keep your eyes open. Keep your ears open, you know, and give something a shot. It may be a better fit than you think.

**SG:** Excellent, excellent advice. I think we all need to be thinking on our feet with some of these things.

**So, do you have any other comments, any other thoughts that you'd like to share.**

**AL:** Sure, I guess I would just say, for the students who are lucky enough to be enrolled in the hospitality program at Stockton, and are still current students, take advantage of that network. Take advantage of the help, take advantage of the ways to get involved, you know. Take the time to build those relationships because it really does make a difference – especially post grad, especially when you're looking for jobs – to have that network. Opportunities may be presented to you that otherwise wouldn't have. So, get your name in there and make those connections, and just take advantage of it while you're there. Because the community is real, it's genuine, and everybody wants to help you succeed.

**SG:** Absolutely. Excellent words to share with our audience. Thank you so much, Alyssa, for spending time with us today, and for sharing your reflections and your experience. So, thank you, and I thank our viewers again for joining us for this Alumni Voices Interview. Thank you so much, and have a great day.

**AL:** Thank you, Sarah. Thank you.