

OPINION

IN OUR OPINION

Timely civic salute to Pesin's canoe ride

Forty years ago this Saturday, a citizen of Jersey City with imagination, unselfish dedication and tremendous civic pride paddled a canoe from the city shoreline to Liberty Island.

Morris Pesin had been convinced by an earlier family trip to the Statue of Liberty that it took far too long for Jersey City people to get via Manhattan to an island so close to Jersey City's shoreline. He decided something needed to be done to make the public and government officials realize how close Liberty Island was to Jersey City and how Jersey City residents deserved a

way to get to the island directly.

The 1958 canoe trip by Pesin, accompanied by a reporter for The Jersey Journal, served as a catalyst that focused public attention on this cause. With the help of Pesin's own later efforts, the work of other civic activists and government officials and a considerable amount of state and federal funds, that attention eventually produced some wonderful results.

Derelict railroad property on the waterfront was transformed into Liberty State Park, which became the most-visited state park in New Jersey. Ferry serv-

ice began between the city and Liberty Island. Not only did the ferries give city residents access to historic Ellis Island as well, but a bridge from the park was built to enable construction crews to get to Ellis, sparking the dream of a pedestrian bridge there.

Another legacy of Pesin's heartfelt civic pride and unselfish activism is the annual Jersey City Cultural Arts Festival. This year's festival — featuring food, musical performances and other examples of Jersey City's creative spirit — will take place Sunday from noon to 6 p.m. at the park.

As a part of that festival, the 40th anniversary of the

late Morris Pesin's 1958 trip will be commemorated.

The city and its residents continue to reap benefits from the chain of events that trip set in motion. Just this year, millions of dollars worth of green park work is getting underway at Liberty State Park, and the U.S. Supreme Court finally established that most of Ellis Island is part of Jersey City.

Those are developments that Morris Pesin would have welcomed with infectious enthusiasm. And they make it especially fitting for the city to honor the man and the trip that served as a catalyst for so many positive waterfront developments.