
In Our Opinion

Boat trip that changed a city

Thirty-five years ago this month, Morris Pesin and a Jersey Journal reporter took a trip to Liberty Island in a canoe.

The purpose was to focus public attention on how close the island was to Jersey City physically, but how the city lacked access to the island and the magnificent, inspiring Statue of Liberty located there.

There was no Liberty State Park then. Much of the area that is now a spectacular waterfront park was owned by the railroads but little utilized. Pesin that month urged creation of such a park. No Liberty Science Center, no ferry service from the city to Ellis Island or the Statue of Liberty, no waterfront walkways along the city's northern riverfront, no plans for a pedestrian bridge from the city to Ellis Island, then existed.

Many civic-minded people and tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money have contributed to the public improvements and positive waterfront development that now form such an important feature of the city. But Pesin played a key role as catalyst; he had the imagination to see the potential inherent in the city's location and the unselfish spirit to do what he could to realize that potential. He really cared about the future of a city that too many people over the years have been ready to give up on — or to betray.

Pesin died last year. Fittingly, a tribute will take place to him tomorrow at the park at the Jersey City Cultural Arts Festival, the annual festival that Pesin, as volunteer leader of the Jersey City Cultural Arts Commission, established.

Citizens and officials alike should not only remember Pesin, but try to foster the forward-looking civic spirit he exemplified.