

The power of a man's vision

By Cynthia Delonas

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In just 30 years, Liberty State Park has been transformed from a state of neglect and decay to a dream come true, a "People's Park," an American treasure and a symbol of freedom.



Liberty State Park is considered one of the best places on the East Coast for flying kites.

But the path to park vibrancy and beautification was not always an easy one, and were it not for the vision and perseverance of Morris Pesin, fondly remembered as the "father" of Liberty State Park, the grounds might have evolved from urban industrial deterioration to commercialization just yards from Lady Liberty's torch-bearing arm.

Pesin wasn't about to let any of that happen. And as his son, Sam Pesin, tells it, it all began back in 1958 with an eight-minute canoe trip, made by the senior Pesin with a newspaper reporter in tow, to the Statue of Liberty. The idea was to show just how close Miss Liberty was to the Jersey City shoreline and to publicize the idea of a park on a waterfront.

Pesin's trip paid off. Stating at a Jersey City council meeting, "We have, here at our doorstep, America's greatest shrine—the Statue of Liberty—and we have failed to realize its potential," Pesin would go on to dedicate his talents and efforts to making the dream of Liberty State Park a reality.

"It took 18 years," said Pesin's son, "but my dad was the driving force be-

hind the movement to secure the park."

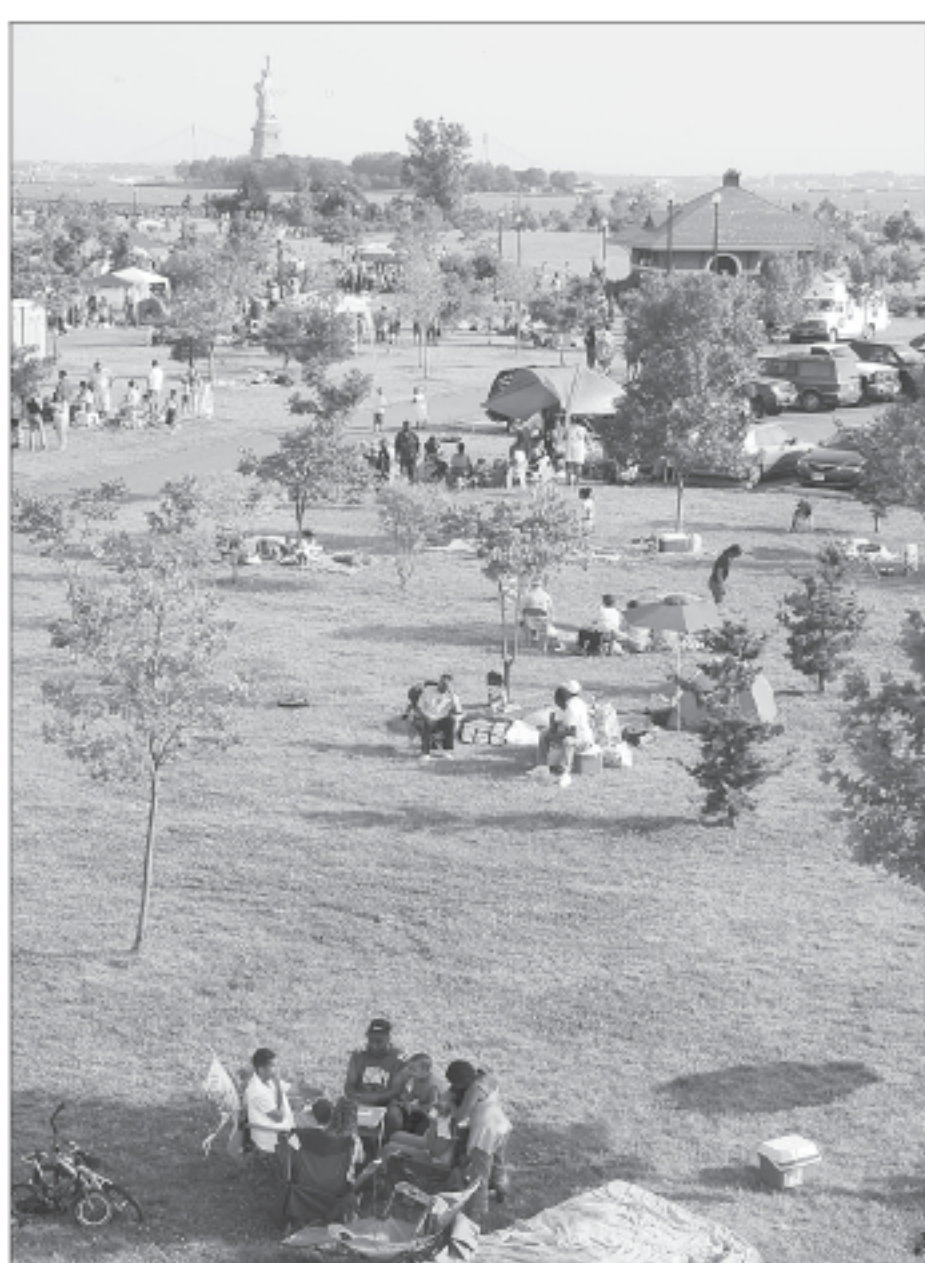
"We were so surprised that so many people came to the park from outside Hudson County," he recalled. "It's an attraction to people from around the state."

In May 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared that Ellis Island was part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, connecting the renovation of the statue with the creation of a waterfront park. That was the first of two milestones in the birth of Liberty State Park. The second was the deeding by Jersey City of 156 acres to the state in August 1965, the first parcel of Liberty State Park.

While progress slowed over the next few years, passage of the 1972 Green Acres Bond Act, along with the strong interest of Richard Sullivan, the first commissioner of the new New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, secured \$3 million for land purchase. And then, appropriately, on Flag Day—June 14, 1976—with Girl and Boy Scouts raising 50 state flags to line the park entrance, Liberty State Park opened to the public—delivering a bicentennial gift to America that has been drawing and delighting visitors ever since.

In 1988, the Friends of Liberty State Park—an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization—was incorporated, dedicating itself to the preservation of open space and the continued improvement of Liberty State Park. "The people put democracy into action and fought for a free park behind the Statue of Liberty," Pesin said. "And the park had many serious threats to overcome."

A golf course was proposed and then, due to overwhelming public sentiment, rejected. Objections included the fact that such usage would have given half of



It took just 30 years for Liberty State Park to be transformed into the open space haven it is today, right at the doorstep of America's symbol of freedom—the Statue of Liberty.

the park's open space to less than 2 percent of the population. A waterpark also was proposed, then rejected, with the explanation that traffic to the waterpark would ruin the park.

Having just celebrated its 30th birthday, Liberty State Park today seems to have entered its prime. Visitors can enjoy boating, canoeing, picnicking, fishing, hiking, biking and numerous special events, including free concerts in the park on Sundays and Tuesdays. "It's a great iconic park, not only for the city, but for the state as well," said Brian O'Reilly, Jersey City administrator. "It puts Jersey City on the map as well,

being located next to the Statue of Liberty."

The park also is one of the best places on the East Coast for flying kites, and the 1.5-mile "Liberty Walk" offers a scenic stroll along the Hudson River. With Liberty State Park now thriving in Jersey City, Marianne Kelleber-Arango of the Jersey City Mayor's office said, "It's a city that feels like a small town."

As Liberty State Park gets set to launch the Liberty Jazz Festival on Sept. 9 and 10, other projects are in the works, including restoration and re-use of the Historic CRRNJ train sheds, an interior natural area restoration encompassing 251 acres, and the building of group picnic pavilions. ◆

At liberty to listen

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kets and chairs, are available through midnight tonight for \$54.50 for single-day admission,

\$69.50 effective Sept. 8; and \$94.50 for both days through midnight tonight, \$115 effective Sept. 8. Reserved premium seating near the stage offering access to a VIP tent with separate food service and restrooms is

available for \$89.50 for one day through midnight tonight, \$125 effective Sept. 8. VIP seating is on a first-come basis.

A portion of the proceeds from ticket sales will benefit FOLSP, an all-volunteer organization whose mission is to protect, beautify and promote the park. Organization members will set up an "eco-village" to

educate people about Liberty State Park.

Tickets are available by calling (800) 556-JAZZ or online at www.nj.com/libertyjazzfestival or at www.cd1019.com. Those interested in exhibitor and corporate hospitality packages may call Kent Coules at (973) 392-5737.

"When The Star-Ledger de-

clined to produce a jazz festival, the idea was not to just put on a concert, but to find a setting that is a star attraction itself," said Coules. "And because of our partnership with radio station CD101.9, smooth jazz aficionados from throughout the metropolitan area will enjoy seeing the best jazz artists in the world." ◆