

**Sam Pesin:  
Advocate for Liberty State Park**

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Photographed by  
Amy Davidson**

**Opposite Photo: Sam Pesin**



It's a bright, clear, sunny day on the shores of the Hudson River in New Jersey's Liberty State Park. Facing inland, Metric is getting ready to play this second day of the first ever All Points West music and arts festival. Facing the water, the Statue of Liberty rises majestically on the horizon, flanked by Ellis Island and standing against the backdrop of the lower Manhattan skyline. Sam Pesin, president of Friends of Liberty State Park, stands in the mid-day sun taking in this first ever three-day ticketed event of the expanse's 32 year history. While pretty much all of the APW attendees can appreciate the stunning singularity of this vista, Sam is one of the few present who know that the park itself is an ongoing 40+ year labor of love springing from one man's unrelenting vision

In 1957 Sam's father, the late Morris Pesin, decided to take a family day trip to the Statue of Liberty. Three hours after leaving his home in Jersey City he found himself on Liberty Island staring across half a mile of river at the town he had just left. As he stood at the feet of one of America's most iconic sights, however, his view over that water yielded a river bank filled with wreckage, garbage and decay. To Morris' eyes, though, that not-so-distant shore held not junk, but promise. The next nineteen years of his life were spent dedicated to taking a forgotten bit of Jersey and turning it into something beautiful.

After years of determination, press conferences, rallies, a stint as city-councilmember and a rowing trip across the river, Liberty State Park opened on June 14, 1976. What was formerly a resting place of New Jersey's rubble and refuse had transformed into a 35-acre green space 2000 feet away from one of the most

striking landmarks in the United States.

Morris spent the next sixteen years fighting for the park he'd spent so long trying to build. He resisted efforts to turn it into, among other things, an amusement park, high rent condos (Coney Island anyone?), a doll museum (seriously), and a golf course. More than that, he saw the space grow into a 200-acre urban oasis drawing 2 million visitors a year.

Today Sam, a self-proclaimed child of rock and roll, speaks the role the park is currently playing as venue and possible burgeoning stop on the annual summer festival circuit.

"This is the best outdoor place in the world to see music," he said under clear skies overlooking clearer waters.

The decision to allow the massive undertaking was not made lightly. The park had been painstakingly rescued from garbage and debris, and Sam and the Friends of Liberty Park were not about to see those days return. As such, festival organizers are bound to return the park to pre-APW conditions at the conclusion of the weekend. Additionally, \$2 from every ticket will go back into the park; money which Sam said will go to planting trees, building group picnic pavilions, and repairing aging fishing jetties. Organizers' emphasis on mass transit systems like the New Jersey light rail or the direct ferry from lower Manhattan further convinced park officials that the festival would show proper respect for the park and the environment as a whole.

"This is one of the most inspiring public places there is," said Sam. He described it as a place that promotes the ideals of democracy (in view of America's greatest symbol of democracy) by bringing together people of all ages, creeds and cultures. "This park is an urban oasis; a spiritual resource."

In this urban environment it is indeed easy to get lost in the bustle of the big city and forget the soothing effect of wide open space. Easy to get used to the noise of traffic and the looming shadows of tall buildings. And it's for that exact reason that Morris Pesin's fifty year-old dream still rings true today.

The Friends of Liberty Park agreed to host All Points West not just to support music, and certainly not just to make money. They wanted to recall in people the feeling and connection to open spaces. This weekend in view of Ellis Island, tens of thousands of city dwellers will become naturalized citizens of a world of open sky and stretching fields of green.

"Urban people need this park," Sam said, the flat grassland under his feet contrasting with the towering Manhattan skyscrapers in the background. Thanks to his work and his father's dream, we have it.

[www.newyorkcool.com/archives/2008/September/music\\_Sam\\_Pesin\\_Liberty\\_State\\_Park.htm](http://www.newyorkcool.com/archives/2008/September/music_Sam_Pesin_Liberty_State_Park.htm)