

# Hudson's farewell to 'heart and soul' of Liberty State Park

By Jason Fink  
Journal staff writer

Longtime community activist and lifelong Jersey City resident Audrey Zapp was honored this past weekend with a farewell ceremony at Liberty State Park, a place she has fought to preserve for its entire 25-year history.

Zapp and her husband, Warren, plan to move to Colorado to be near their son, Rennie, who lives in Boulder.

"Audrey's been the heart and soul of this place," said Greg Remaud, president of the Liberty State Park Conservancy, one of many environmental organizations Zapp has been involved with over the years. "She is absolutely irreplaceable."

About 100 people, including U.S. Rep. Robert Menendez, D-Union City, crowded into the park's Interpretive Center on Freedom Way Saturday afternoon to pay tribute to Zapp and to wish her well as she prepares for her move west.

"Of course I'll be sad to leave Jersey City and all my friends, but there's a whole new world opening up for me," the 75-year old Zapp said as she sat at a table surrounded by friends and family. "I feel that it's just a passing of the torch."

It is a torch that Zapp has carried for more than 30 years as one of the state's most tireless environmental activists. In 1979, she received the Special Award of Merit from the federal Environmental Protection Agency for her efforts in the establishment of Liberty State Park in 1976, as well as for leading many other preservation drives throughout Hudson County.

"Today is a happy and a sad day," said Sam Pesin, president of the Friends of Liberty State Park and son of the late Morris Pesin, who along with Zapp was instrumental in turning the more than 1,000 acres of once-neglected land into the state's largest urban park.

"She is a selfless activist on behalf of the park and all urban people," Pesin added. "She is a general in the people's army."

The military metaphor seemed appropriate, as Zapp spent years fighting various development projects that she



Journal photo by Joe Sarno

**AUDREY ZAPP** smiles at her farewell party Saturday in Liberty State Park, Jersey City.

felt endangered the park's essential public character.

"Because I was born in Jersey City, I was probably a street-fighter," she said, laughing. "But things are not as perilous in the park as they once were."

Zapp first came to prominence in

Jersey City in 1969 when she organized the "Save the Boulevard Committee," which successfully prevented a federal highway from being constructed along a five-mile stretch of Kennedy Boulevard. A year later, she led efforts to preserve the Hudson County Courthouse, which was in danger of being torn down.

In perhaps her greatest achievement, Zapp helped secure state Green Acres funding to buy much of the land that is now Liberty State Park from the Central Railroad of New Jersey. A portion of Liberty State Park is named Audrey Zapp Drive.

"Without her, we wouldn't have what we have," said Marvin Silber, a member of the state Audubon Society, with which Zapp has always worked closely. "She inspires us."

During the often rocky history of the park, Zapp helped defeat plans for two golf courses, a theme park and a toy and doll manufacturing plant. In the latest round, many people at Saturday's festivities — including Zapp herself — urged city officials not to go through with plans to develop a water park on 20 acres of land southwest of the Liberty Science Center.

Menendez called Zapp's efforts over the years "a great legacy" that will transcend her lifetime.

"It's an American story of one individual making a powerful difference," Menendez said before delivering a line that produced knowing laughter in the crowd: "New Jersey will never be the same," he said. "And neither will Colorado."

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