



Liberty State Park News

Volume 5, Issue 1

Summer 2001

Liberty at 25: Celebrating the past and Charting the Future

The mission of Liberty State Park is to provide the public with access to the harbor's resources, a sense of its history and the charge of responsibility for its continued improvement.

On June 14, 2001 Liberty State Park celebrated its 25th Anniversary. Since its establishment on Flag Day of 1976, this former transportation hub has become a green oasis in the heart of New Jersey's second largest urban center. For local residents and millions of annual visitors Liberty has become a welcome refuge of open and natural space, providing free public access to the harbor and its resources. For local and migratory wildlife Liberty State Park has also become a much needed haven, providing vital habitat and breeding grounds to some of the state's most vulnerable species.

As Liberty celebrates this milestone we can reflect upon the amazing progress of the past 25 years. Literally from the ashes emerged a shared vision of what this once, dilapidated railroad yard could become. Its beginnings included one functional facility which still operates as the Administration/Welcome Center at the park's south end. In the late 1970s the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal (CRRNJ) was reopened to the public following a multi-million dollar restoration effort. With the construction of the Interpretive Center in the 1980s, the park began offering programs which focused on the harbor estuary resources to both the general public and school groups. Greater public access to the waterfront was also provided with the opening of Liberty Walk in 1986. The two-mile promenade now stretches from one end of Liberty to the next, offering spectacular views of the harbor, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

Today, Liberty offers visitors an array of recreational and educational opportunities. Cultural and natural history programs and exhibits attract visitors year around at the CRRNJ Terminal and the Interpretive Center. Recreational opportunities abound at the park's playgrounds, grassy fields, picnic areas and boat launch facility. Liberty Science Center, now in its eighth year, is home to three floors of world class exhibits and outstanding educational programs. In 1998 Liberty Landing Marina opened its docks, providing even greater access to the harbor's resources.

Throughout its history Liberty has strived to balance this need for development with its responsibility to protect and preserve its invaluable resources. In looking toward the future, Liberty's charge grows ever more crucial. The park's remaining undeveloped land consists of 251 acres of former railroad yard. Since recolonized by a variety of plant communities, this interior section currently provides vital wetlands and forest habitat for resident and seasonal wildlife.

In order to best manage this final phase of development, the Division of Parks and Forestry has called upon leaders from the state, environmental organizations, local institutions and surrounding communities. Their challenge - to develop a list of alternatives that would best protect the resource while satisfying the needs of the surrounding community and other park visitors. This has indeed been the challenge throughout Liberty's history.

As in the past, public sentiment shows strong support for the maintenance of the park's interior as a natural space and while the details are still being hashed out in committee, Liberty's future looks brighter than ever.

Liberty's Godmother



Audrey Zapp (left) accepts bouquet from former LSP staff member Diane Hewlett-Lowrie.

This past December, friends and colleagues gathered to pay tribute and bid farewell to the woman often referred to as the "Godmother" of Liberty State Park. Audrey Zapp, along with late husband Warren Zapp, spent nearly three decades fighting for the creation and preservation of what has become New Jersey's premier urban state park. It has been said that Audrey never lost an environmental battle and Liberty State Park was no exception.

Together with local resident and city councilman Morris Pesin, Audrey was a forerunner in the park's creation and a leading advocate throughout its often tumultuous evolution.

In the early days, Audrey's tireless lobbying helped to secure Green Acres funding for the purchase of parklands from Jersey City. In 1977, she was invited to serve on the Governor's Liberty State Park Study and Planning Commission and later with the park's Public Advisory Commission. Throughout her tenure with the commission and later, through her work with the Friends of Liberty State Park and the Liberty State Park Conservancy, Audrey championed the cause for commercial-free, open "green" space. She fought against proposals for landfills on the southern peninsula, private marinas, golf courses in the interior and commercial water parks on the perimeter. She rallied support for the protection of Caven Point Cove and focused public attention on the dire need to respect and conserve the harbor and its resources.

Audrey was as active in the rest of her community as she was at Liberty. Over the years, she received numerous awards for her environmental advocacy. In 1976, she was honored with the New Jersey Audubon Society's Conservation Award and the American Motor's National Conservation Award. In 1977, the US Environmental Protection Agency presented Mrs. Zapp with the Special Award of Merit for her outstanding dedication and commitment.

Audrey was a leading figure in nearly every local conservation issue of her day. She will continue to serve as an inspiration to many and a testament to the power of the human spirit. We wish her all the best in her new adventure out west.

Warren C. Zapp 1922-2001

This edition of LSP News is dedicated to the forever present spirit of Warren Zapp. A long time park advocate and generous supporter, Warren's many contributions were marked by his chronicling of Liberty's natural beauty and transformation from railroad yard to urban oasis. His work and commitment along with wife Audrey's persistence and determination, were among the driving forces behind Liberty's creation.

Thank you Warren-we'll miss you.