

Supporters celebrate the 'pearl of all park land'

By **CHARLES HACK**
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Half a century after Liberty State Park was conceived by its "father," Morris Pesin, supporters gathered yesterday at Liberty House Restaurant to celebrate its many milestones.

More than 150 guests gathered yesterday to remember Pesin and also mark next month's 20th anniversary of the founding of Friends of Liberty State Park.

It was 50 years since Pesin began his tireless campaign to promote the free park, which was symbolically launched in June 1958 with an historic eight-minute canoe trip to the Statue of Liberty from New Jersey to show how close the namesake would be to the future park.

"He never stopped fighting for the dream," said Agustin Torres, opinion page editor for The Jersey Journal, in a speech.

"The Journal chronicled and supported his every step" — in fact, that canoe trip was made with a Jersey Journal reporter paddling along with Pesin.

U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez — who helped secure \$20.6 million in federal funds to create and restore a 234-acre contaminated former rail yard at the center of the park, turning them from brownfields into salt and fresh water wetlands, grasslands and urban forest — said the park is a model for other urban wetland restoration projects.

"The restored and preserved forests in the Liberty State Park are a model for the entire country," Menendez said. "It will be one of

the largest continuous areas of natural established hardwoods in the metropolitan area."

Mayor Jerramiah T. Healy commended Sam Pesin, Morris Pesin's son and the president of the Friends of Liberty State Park, for keeping up his father's legacy.

"It's not often that a son surpasses his father," Healy said. "This is the pearl of all park land in the state of New Jersey."

The Friends, who successfully fought proposals to bring a commercial golf course and a waterpark to the park, are now opposing the location of the "Empty Sky" 9/11 memorial, saying it would block views of Lower Manhattan.

In all, eight awards were presented to volunteers and corporate sponsors.

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SAM PESIN speaks yesterday at a luncheon celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Friends of Liberty State Park and the 50th anniversary of the canoe trip of his father, Morris Pesin. Morris Pesin is pictured on the front of the podium. **EMILY ANNE EPSTEIN** JOURNAL PHOTO