
COMMENTARY

The Good News About Liberty State Park

Liberty State Park is an urban oasis located in Jersey City along the Hudson River astride Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Each year 5 million people from all over New Jersey and around the world come to enjoy the Park's myriad cultural, historic, recreational and natural splendors. Visitation here is on par with Yellowstone National Park.

Recently there was great news for Liberty State Park, and that is great news for us all. 240 acres of the Park's interior, fenced off to the public for a generation due to contamination, will be cleaned, restored and open to the public. Better still, the project is fully funded by legal settlements from polluters. This victory is the result of a tenacious 15-year public campaign, coupled with a top-notch State Office of Natural Resource Restoration.

The restoration will be amazing! Water runoff from Liberty Science Center parking lot and roadways will now be cleansed and directed to create freshwater wetlands; open field grass and woodlands will support Northern Harrier and other birds; and, an arm of the Hudson will be extended to return tidal marsh and wildlife to this area.

Millions of people will have ready access to trails leading to a rich diversity of nature - just behind the Statue of Liberty!

Adjacent to sacred American icons, attracting so many visitors, providing an escape route and Red Cross Emergency Services Center during horrific 9-11 attacks, and significant self-financing you would figure the Park would be treated like a gem. It is just the opposite. Because of its prime location and popularity, Liberty is a target for every greedy scheme and bought politician that might divert free public amenities or beneficial park concessions into private sweetheart leases.

Recently, it was an attempted last minute lease-away the park's south side public fishing jetties, picnic areas and parking to a private marina operator. Thankfully, it's been stopped by public outrage, a legal injunction, and instant leadership by Governor Phil Murphy.

Sam Pesin, President of the Friends of Liberty State Park, with a legion of thousands of public minded individuals have fended off two dozen such scams, to keep LSP "a free green urban oasis for all," as envisioned by park founder Morris, Sam's father.

However, when the park was conceived this location was a run-down wreck of a formerly great waterfront. Beat up and exhausted after safely harboring 12 million American immigrants through Ellis Island, and many African Americans to freedom through a nearby stop on the Underground Railroad.

Yet, community spirit and the public trust has prevailed each time, as happens in every caring community.

So, if you're working to restore water quality or oysters along the Navesink, contributing to the Count Basie or Monmouth Arts Council, if you help Riverside or Bayshore Hospital, or voluntarily plant flowers, tutor a child or give selflessly, like so many Two Rivers folks do, you are part of the same great shared community that thrives at LSP.

To borrow from the great Martin Luther King: Community spirit anywhere, is community spirit everywhere.

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