THE STAR-LEDGER, Thursday, September 7, 2006

From left, Hudson County Executive Thomas DeGise, New Jersey Gov. Jon S. Corzine and Friends of Liberty State Park President Sam Pesin celebrate Liberty State Park's 30th birthday with a cake on Earth Day—April 22, 2006.

Making Friends for park's sake

By Cynthia Delonas
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To ensure citizen involvement in guiding the park's progress. To cooperate with the New Jersey Division of Parks and Forestry to carry out Liberty State Park's mission to "provide the public with access to the harbor's resources, a sense of its history and the charge of responsibility for its continued improvements." To raise funds to assist in shaping a great park. To increase volunteerism in the park.

These are the goals of the Friends of Liberty State Park, or FOLSP. The all-volunteer, grassroots, open-space park organization has been protecting, beautifying and promoting Liberty State Park since 1988. Headed by President Sam Pesin — whose father, Morris Pesin was instrumental in getting the park approved, designed and built—FOLSP has fought and won numerous battles to protect the park from neglect, decay and commercialization. The group's success is evident today in the positive impact it's had on the park's evolution.

FOLSP was responsible for establishing the state's largest playground, the creation of a park shuttle-bus system connecting to the Liberty State Park Light Rail Station and the sponsorship of a Spring clean-up of the salt marsh. In November, FOLSP offers history programs, and in April co-sponsors an Earth Day Festival. FOLSP also co-sponsors festivals at the Interpretive Center and Train Terminal. FOLSP's Garden Program uses volunteers to plant and maintain the park's flower beds and trees.

Some of FOLSP's fund-raising priorities include building group-picnic pavilions, restoring the interior natural area with public access on trails and an open-space perimeter, and restoration and re-use of the historic Central Railroad of New Jersey train sheds.

FOLSP encourages public participation in the decision-making concerning Liberty State Park's future. The group works with and listens to local and state citizens in the planning of park activities and improvements. It also publishes periodic newsletters and mailings with updates on projects, activities and current issues. Members meet in the Fall and Spring.

Upcoming events at Liberty State Park include Estuary Day on Sept. 30, an event open to the public celebrating National Estuaries Day. The event will feature a Hudson River cleanup; a wildlife presentation by Snakes-n-Scales and Turtle Tales; and an opportunity to create a memory at the arts and crafts center. Visitors can learn about the behaviors and habitats of crocodiles, turtles, lizards and snakes, and have an opportunity to see these animals live. The program is free, but pre-registration is required.

On Oct. 14, Bats, Bats, Bats presents New Jersey's own batman, Joseph D'Angeli, who promises to clear up some common misconceptions about this flying mammal while providing an up-close look at a few of them. This event also is free; space is limited and pre-registration is required.

Exploring Rainforests is the focus of a program taking place Nov. 18. Live, exotic rainforest animals from around the globe will be presented to visitors. Pre-registration is required for this free event.

For more information about these programs, call (201) 915-3409. To volunteer or become a member of the Friends of Liberty State Park, call (201) 792-1993 or e-mail at folsp@earthlink.net. The FOLSP Web site is www.folsp.org.