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# Garden program blossoming

By Cynthia Delonas  
Advertising Business  
Services Staff

In the land of the free, with the help of some brave volunteers, Lady Liberty has been graciously overseeing an American treasure more than 30 years in the making. Liberty State Park, with plans in place for a 250-acre interior natural area that will include nature trails, a 100-acre forest and tall grass habitat, freshwater wetlands, a salt marsh re-created by a channel entering from the Hudson River, and an open space perimeter, continues its remarkable transformation from overgrown industrial wasteland to urban oasis. But it almost didn't happen.

Through the efforts of the late Morris Pesin, who in 1958 canoed with a reporter out to Liberty Island to illustrate the proximity of the Statue of Liberty to New Jersey's shore, the fate of Liberty State Park has become a cause celebre among developers, preservationists, residents and the Friends of Liberty State Park (FOLSP), a volunteer group formed in 1988. Prior to Pesin's vision of a family-friendly people's park and subsequent activism, the Jersey

City land that served as a backdrop to Lady Liberty was known for its extensive freight and passenger transportation network, the heart of which was the Central Railroad of New Jersey Terminal, located in the northern portion of the park.

Over the years, with the help of volunteers, the park, literally, has blossomed.

"The garden volunteer program is very successful," said Sam Pesin, son of Morris Pesin, and president of FOLSP. "Each year, there's an expansion of the number of volunteers, and all people are welcome to join in. The FOLSP buys the plants, tools, refreshments and so on. Last Fall, they planted 60,000 bulbs in Liberty State Park, and those bulbs were paid for from grants from The Star-Ledger, from last year's Jazz Festival, in conjunction with Promo 1. It was a generous grant."

Pesin said FOLSP was accepted this Spring as an associate member of EarthShare of New Jersey, an organization whose members work within the community to educate the public and find solutions to environmental issues and challenges.

"It's really an honor that EarthShare accepted us as a member," Pesin said. "It gives us more positive exposure."



Turning an overgrown industrial wasteland into an urban oasis takes hard work.

Pesin also said the garden program's horticulturist, Maria de Wakefield, has been instrumental in bringing the Rutgers Master Gardener's class to Liberty State Park. "It's the first master gardener's class offered by Rutgers in Hudson County," Pesin said.

Michel Cuillerier, vice-president of FOLSP, who has been actively involved with the organization since 1992, said, "Part of the certification to become a master gardener is to volunteer 60 hours, but they've been volunteering way beyond 60 hours. They're guaranteed to have fun

And they make a real big difference because they either get to create new gardens or maintain existing gardens." Volunteers generally pitch in on Saturdays from 8 to 11 a.m., but Cuillerier said they are welcome to help out any time.

Although FOLSP would prefer Liberty State Park not be thought of as a "venue," Cuillerier admitted the opportunity to host concerts benefits the park because "it brings in new friends and visitors" who are likely to return at a later date.

"Our mission is to conserve, maintain and keep (the park) a

quiet area for people to come to," he said. "There's an openness toward having fee-admission concerts in the park because we are always diligently working to save the park from over-development and commercialization that would inhibit or deny access to the public to enjoy the park in the first place," Cuillerier said.

"We're definitely not talking about the park becoming a venue for concerts, even though it's got one of the best views, he said. "We'd like it that each concert is a possible fundraiser for the park — that some of the proceeds are given to the park."

Of FOLSP, Cuillerier said, "Since we are 100 percent non-profit, and have a board of directors, none of the money gets used by us. It goes through us to the park."

According to Cuillerier, FOLSP's volunteer garden program has been expanding to work with corporations, and among those whose employees are helping to create new gardens are Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse and AIG. Gardens within Liberty State Park include a bird garden, a butterfly garden, a wildflower garden and an herb garden.

"If anybody walks through the Millennium Park, they'll see our work," Cuillerier said. "Flowers are blooming now." ◆



Within sight of Manhattan's famed skyline are a number of trees and gardens that are planted and maintained by the Friends of Liberty State Park.

## Many green thumbs keep park in full bloom

By Joe Arney  
Advertising Business Services Staff  
Special to *The Star-Ledger*

If the first thing visitors to Liberty State Park notice is the view, the second must be the grounds.

It's not hard to see why. A quick stroll through the grounds reveals a variety of flowers, plants and trees that reflect the dedication of the Garden Volunteer Program, a branch of the Friends of Liberty State Park (FOLSP) that works each week to beautify the park.

"It began with a grant from the (Geraldine R.) Dodge Foundation ... for a 9/11 memorial planting in the park," said Michel Cuillerier, a vice-president with FOLSP. Since those humble roots, it has blossomed into an organization that solicits corporate partnerships, enjoys strong volunteerism and hosts an acclaimed statewide garden program.

The gardens feature a number of seasonal plants and flowers, and include wild roses and trumpet flowers, among many others. There also are theme gardens in the park, such as butterfly and herb gardens.

FOLSP funded \$10,000 worth of trees in the Spring in concert with the New Jersey Tree Foundation, which selected, delivered and planted the trees. The Friends host several fundraisers to acquire tools and plants for the volunteers. "Without them, there would really be no gardening program," Cuillerier said.

The program also has enjoyed the support of corporations, particularly neighboring Goldman Sachs, said Sam Pesin, president of FOLSP.

Three years ago, Rutgers Cooperative Extension hosted the certified master gardener



The park is home to all kinds of plants and wildlife.

program for the first time at Liberty State Park. It gives those interested in gardening a chance "to learn something about what they're doing ... in a technical way," Cuillerier said.

Additionally, New Jersey City University students have played a recent role in the volunteer effort, as students of Dr. Cindy Arrigo began playing a role last Fall.

The park's gardens have flourished even more with the hiring of horticulturist Maria de Wakefield, who helps supervise volunteers while selecting native, noninvasive plants to beautify the grounds.

"She has taken plots filled with weeds ... and completely restored the gardens" with the help of volunteers, he said.

The volunteers "have made a real difference in the number and quality of the park's gardens," Pesin said. Volunteers work in the park between 8 and 11 a.m. each Saturday, except holidays, for the entire year.

"Because they come every week, they really feel they make a difference at the park," Cuillerier said. ♦