

Darby McGlone
Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy
Summer 2015
1

Up until about 60 years ago, the piers along the East River that now make up Brooklyn Bridge Park were used as ports for various kinds of industrial activities, primarily shipping purposes. Then, in the 1940s, these piers were actually renovated to accommodate additional industrial capacity, but these renovations did not account for the tremendous upsurge in container shipping that was soon to take place throughout the world. As container shipping grew and became the most efficient means of aquatically transporting large quantities of goods and services, the piers were deemed too close in proximity to one another and unable to accommodate the larger shipping vessels. As such, other trade routes became more optimal, leaving piers 1 - 6 to go unutilized until years later when several different interest groups began contesting for the use of the space, park advocates among them.

In the last five years, Brooklyn Bridge Park has become one of the most unique and engaging parks in one of the biggest cities in the world. What started as a small, determined group of people interested in salvaging Brooklyn's old industrial shipping piers has developed into the coalition that is presently known as Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy. The Conservancy provides numerous free programs that millions of people enjoy each year while a separate division, Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation, is in charge of all Park maintenance and

innovation. This past summer I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work for the Conservancy.

Upon my arrival, I was stunned by the breathtaking view of Manhattan, one that is easily visible from just about any point in the Park. During orientation, we toured the piers, learning of each one's uniqueness and significance, ranging from basketball courts and roller skating rinks to forested paths and greenways that make you feel completely isolated from the City. Perhaps the most architecturally and sustainably impressive pier is Pier One, where many of the resources used in developing the pier were salvaged from old broken down structures, notably the old warehouses that once lined the piers.

As a summer associate to the Conservancy, my responsibilities primarily revolved around helping facilitate various programs and events. Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays were devoted to the youth kayaking program which involved moving kayaks, paddles and PFD's to the dock and ultimately, after a great deal of on-land instruction, getting the kids out on the water. The campers ranged from five to sometimes twenty years old, and for the majority of them it was their first experience in a boat, if not their first time directly interacting with an active body of water. After calming their nerves and ensuring their safety, it was great to actually be out there the with them and see how they handled this new adventure. Needless to say, it has been an extremely rewarding experience.

Syfy Movies With a View, an event that takes place on Pier One, opened on July 16th with highly anticipated "Sharknado 2: The Second One." Whether I was

cooking up popcorn or helping set up lights, these were some of the busier but more entertaining nights I had at the park. The rest of my responsibilities would often vary from week to week. Office work consisted of tasks such as updating container inventory spreadsheets and scanning documents, however, by the end of the summer, I was conducting research on estuarine fish species or writing blogs, one of which is expected to be uploaded to the Park's website sometime in the near future. This blog, named after the educational park program "Awesome Oysters," is certainly one of my more fulfilling accomplishments this summer.

Overall, though, my most memorable experiences involved actually witnessing first hand how this park makes such a hugely positive impact on so many people's lives. In Sewanee, we are spoiled to live in such an incredibly ecologically unique area with so many beautiful, luscious green spaces, yet the vast majority of the student body has hardly touched upon even a quarter of the University's 13,000 acre campus. This past summer was my first experience both living and working in a city, and it has seriously changed my perspective on the value of green spaces. To have the ability to escape the bustling noise and pollution for even just a few hours not only allows for a greater appreciation of nature, but it legitimately improves people's attitudes and daily lives.

Considering that in the next thirty years, the vast majority of the world's growing population will be forced to live in predominantly urban centers, I

cannot think of a more valuable first internship experience than my work with the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy. The concept of urban sustainability is a relatively new one, but also an undeniably necessary one, and Brooklyn Bridge Park is a beacon of sustainable light in a City that is otherwise dominated by waste, smog, and concrete. I am entirely certain that I will apply much of what I have learned here at Brooklyn Bridge Park to the rest of my time at Sewanee, and undoubtedly while I am abroad in Copenhagen this upcoming semester.