

## Lowdown on saving the High Line

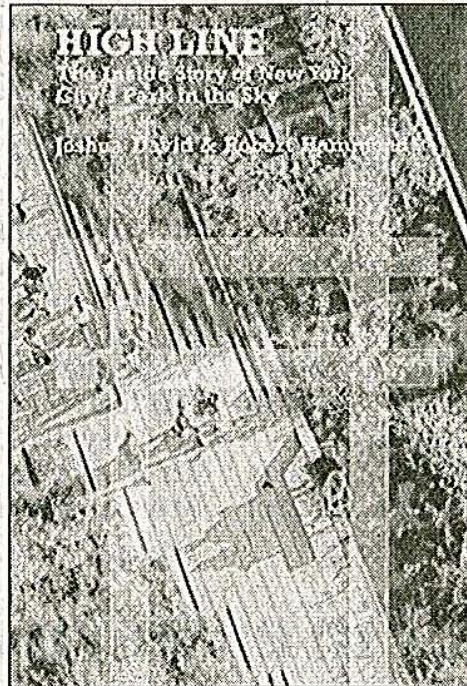
### Key figures explain NY transformation

By Steve Wiser

Special to The Courier-Journal

Why doesn't someone do something about that?" Whether it is a neighborhood improvement or major civic initiative, we always are asking someone else to undertake the hard work to make something productive happen. "High Line: The Inside Story of New York City's Park in the Sky" is the behind-the-scenes story of two individuals who did seek to "do something about that." The authors, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, initially were like most everyone else: content to sit on the sidelines and let others take the "slings and arrows" of trying to achieve a significant community project.

The name "High Line" refers to an elevated railroad track that once ran above the congested lower Manhattan streets. It was abandoned, with no trains serving the meatpacking and ware-



house district for several decades. Rusting and deteriorating, the High Line was an eyesore that everyone wanted to demolish, except two people: David and Hammond.

After separately attending a forum on what to do about the High Line, they joined forces in a David versus Goliath struggle. Government officials, developers, area businesses, neighbor-

### High Line: The Inside Story of New York City's Park in the Sky

By Joshua David and Robert Hammond, FSG Originals, 352 pp./\$29.95

hood groups, etc., all wanted this dilapidated relic removed. But the authors had a grander vision of how the High Line could not only be saved, but transformed into a significant economic development resource for lower Manhattan.

Neither man had any experience in addressing the bureaucracy or technical issues they would have to overcome, but they had large amounts of passion and "stick-to-it-ness" that would ultimately prevail.

This book is told in an alternating narrative, where each author provides his own opinions and reasoning as to what they were trying to accomplish. This back-and-forth style is entertaining and keeps the reader wondering how these two authors ever made it through this ordeal as friends. Their fast-paced activities are sometimes humorous while at

other times very stressful.

While they began with no coherent strategy, there evolved a methodical, textbook example of how to succeed at a quixotic undertaking. Reading about how they went from needing to raise a few thousand dollars for an informational brochure to eventually seeking tens of millions in donations is worth the book's value. Their methods of gaining publicity and networking with prominent civic leaders is also a beneficial process to learn about.

There is no suspense in the ending, since the High Line has been reborn into one of New York City's most scenic and popular "must see" attractions. If you have experienced the High Line, then you will enjoy this first-hand account of how it came about.

The next time you have a thought about "why doesn't someone do something about that," give this book a read for some inspiration.

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*Steve Wiser is a local architect and historian who has been involved in numerous civic improvement initiatives.*