

Roxbury Road Race Series Civic Projects

By Scott Benjamin

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The Roxbury Road Race Series raises money annually for projects ranging from grants to the area high school cross country and track & field teams to the municipal park improvement fund and Lyme Disease Awareness.

For example, since 1996 the runners in the weekly races have raised more than \$44,000 for the annual T-shirt/grant campaign. Starting in 1997 it has annually given a plaque to Union Savings Bank for its contribution to that effort. It presented a plaque in 2016 to Marge De Marrais of Sharon, who occasionally runs in the races, for her contributions to the fund through the years. A year earlier, a plaque was given to David McNamara of Southbury for raising money through a poster that he created on the series.

Each year since 1996, the runners have purchased T-shirts that feature art work on the front of the shirt and the sponsors on the back. For the last 21 years, Dave Harvey, a former Bridgewater resident occasionally runs in the races, has designed the primary art work.

Since 2000, part of the money has also been used to provide grants to the cross country and track & field programs at the Nonnewaug-Woodbury, Shepaug Valley-Washington, Pomperaug-Southbury, New Milford, Oxford and Brookfield high schools. Those funds have been used to pay for such items as trails, reflective vests, training apparatus, transportation services, track equipment and timing devices. Collectively, the runners have contributed more than \$10,000 to those schools. In 2017, Pomperaug High School-Southbury was awarded \$400 to purchase medicine balls and New Milford High School received \$200 toward sending a cross country harrier to running camp.

For more than 25 years the series devoted money from three races annually to the Roxbury Recreation Commissions park improvement fund. In most years the grand total was at least \$600. In 2017, the series began hosting a 6.2-mile run in August with proceeds from the entry fees benefitting the Roxbury Recreation Commission.

Some of the money from the 2012 MidSummer Championship was used to buy road cones for the series.

The runners also had joined forces with the Roxbury Congregational Church and the Roxbury Recreation Commission almost each year from 2001 to 2016 to sponsor the Run For A Cure, a Thanksgiving Day race that usually generated about \$1,500, which was divided between American Cancer Society's Relay For Life and the cancer center at New Milford Hospital. More than \$2,500 was generated in the 2013 event. The 2015 race raised more than \$1,600 combined for the two organizations and the 2016 run netted \$1,294.

In 2017, the runners began sponsoring the annual Roxbury Thanksgiving Charity race, which generated \$770 last November for Hurricane Harvey relief in Texas.

Starting in 2008, the series began holding a 3.1-mile race annually to benefit research into autism and juvenile diabetes. They generated \$215 from the 2016 event, which was held in August. The runners began holding an annual race in 2009 at the Roxbury Land Trust property on River Road to support that organization. The event netted \$260 in 2016. Each September the series raises money from a 2.4-mile staggered-start race named after former longtime Roxbury regular Ed Sandifer. In 2016 that event generated \$195.

Since 2004, the Roxbury Road Race Series has sponsored the Roxbury Marathon and Half-Marathon each autumn. Those races have attracted runners from throughout the United States. The 2016 marathon champion traveled from Virginia and there were several runners from outside Connecticut that ran in the 2017 edition.

In May 2014 the series co-sponsored a combined 3.7-mile run/1.8-mile walk to promote Lyme Disease Awareness. The initial event raised \$380 for treasury of

the Class of 2017 at Shepaug Valley High School-Washington as well as additional money for Lyme Disease research. That second annual run in 2015 collected \$650 for the two funds. The event was held again in 2016 and in 2017 it generated \$332 for Lyme Disease Awareness and another \$100 for the Class of 2017's treasury.

Each December since 2011 the runners have suggested that entrants bring an unwrapped toy to the final race of the season and then have contributed those items to needy children during the holiday season through the donation box at the Roxbury Market. About 20 toys were given in 2017.

In 2015 for the first time, the series collected pre-used clothing, which was donated to the Loaves & Fishes charity in New Milford, which in return provided \$60 to the series. A similar event was held in 2016 and 2017 and will be held again on November 25, 2018.

In June 2014, the series contributed \$100 to Roxbury's Joey Fund and through the years, the runners have made similar donations to organizations related to victims of the 2015 and 2017 house fires in Roxbury, the 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti.

The series also held a fund-raiser called Seussical The Musical in March 2016 that collected \$250 for the theater production at Shepaug Valley High School. The runners also combined with the Minor Memorial Library in June 2016 for Exercise Your Mind, a combined run/walk that promoted awareness about the library's summer reading program. The series held its MidSummer Championship race at the library in 2017, raising \$170 for the facility. It will again hold that event in July 2018.

The runners had entry fees at a race in May 2017 for the CT Challenge bike event, which helped provide money for cancer research. In August 2017 they started an annual 6.2-mile run to raise money for the Roxbury Recreation Commission. The initial run netted about \$200.

Brian Vanderheiden, who has run in the series for more than a decade, organized a run from Roxbury to Newtown in December 2012 to honor the 26 victims of the shootings at the Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The series started on July 2, 1977 at the Booth Free Elementary School under the direction of Dr. William Burley, a Roxbury resident who was then an elementary school principal in New Milford. It was held over eight Saturdays in July and August. It started to expand in the mid-1980s under head director Larry Kershner, who also lived in Roxbury. It expanded in the mid-1980's to 40 races, which are held from the third week in February to early December.

About 75 percent of the races have no entry fee.

Shortly after the series moved to the Everett Hurlburt Community Park on Apr. 7, 1990, the runners purchased a sign that was posted near the entrance and then in 2009 paid to trim the weeds around the sign and re-painted it.

Two of the championship races are named after the first two head directors of the series – Dr. Burley - the Midsummer - and Dr. Kershner - the MidSpring.