

Roxbury Road Race Series Civic Projects

Report 2020

By Scott Benjamin

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The Roxbury Road Race Series has raised money for projects ranging from the local land trust, to the Minor Memorial Library to grants to the area high school cross country and track & field teams to the municipal park improvement fund and donations to the Roxbury Food Bank.

For example, the series donated \$500 to the Roxbury Land Trust on Saturday, July 13, 2019 during its 11th annual run starting and finishing at the organization's River Road preserve. It also gave \$500 in 2018.

In 2018 and 2019 the series donated \$250 each year to the Minor Memorial Library for a summer reading program through the efforts of a committee led by Janet Levy.

The runners raised \$1,483 on Thanksgiving Day 2019 at their third annual charity run. That money was donated to the Joseph Awlasewicz Scholarship through the Roxbury Scholarship Foundation. The event annexed \$560 for that scholarship in 2018. The first event netted \$770 in 2017 for relief efforts to assist the victims of Hurricane Harvey in Texas.

From 1996 through 2017 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 yearly contribution to that effort. It presented a plaque in 2016 to Marge DeMarrais 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.

The T-shirts featured art work on the front of the shirt and the sponsors on the back. For 21 years, Dave Harvey, a former Bridgewater resident occasionally runs in the races designed the primary art work.

From 2000 through 2017, 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.

In 2019, through the efforts of Janet Levy and David McNamara scholarships were given to two runners at Shepaug Valley High School.

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.

From 2008 through 2017, the series held 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. From 2010 through 2017 the series raises money from a 2.4-mile staggered-start race named after former longtime Roxbury regular Ed Sandifer. In 2016, for example, 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 donated in 2019, 26 toys were given in 2018 and 20 toys in 2017.

In 2019, the series received at least 17 donations of non-perishable foods during a November campaign and donated them to the Roxbury Food Bank at the Christ Church.

In 2015 for the first time, the series collected pre-owned 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 from 2016-2018.

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 a MidSummer Championship race at the library in 2017, raising \$170 for the facility.

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 held a 6.2-mile run to raise money for the Roxbury Recreation Commission. It generated \$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.

Since 2011 the runners have held an annual holiday party. Since 2015 the event has been held in the Ed Went Room at the Roxbury Town Hall.

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. The current schedule of 39 races goes from early March to early December.

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.

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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.