

Roxbury Road Race Series Civic Projects

By Scott Benjamin

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The Roxbury Road Race Series provides 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 the local land trust.

For example, since 1996, the runners in the weekly races have raised more than \$40,000 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.

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.

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 \$9,000 to those schools. Pomperaug received \$600 in 2015, which was used to purchase cross-training machines for its fitness center.

The series holds championship races each year in May, July and November in which the proceeds are donated to the Roxbury park improvement fund. In most recent years, the combined funding from those three races has been more than \$600. Some of the money from the 2012 MidSummer Championship was used to buy road cones for the series.

The runners also have joined forces with the Roxbury Congregational Church and the Roxbury Recreation Commission almost each year since 2001 to sponsor the Run For A Cure, a Thanksgiving Day race that usually generates about \$2,000 that is 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.

Starting in 2008, the series began hold a 3.1-mile race each September to benefit research into autism and juvenile diabetes. They generated \$222 from the 2015 event. The runners began holding a race annually in 2009 at the Roxbury Land Trust property on River Road to support that organization. It typically raises at least \$200 annually. Each September the runners raise money in a 2.4-mile run named after former longtime Roxbury regular Ed Sandifer.

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.

In May 2014 the series co-sponsored a Lyme Awareness 3.7-mile race that raised \$380 for 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 will again be held May 14, 2016.

Each December starting in 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.

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 a 2015 house fire in Roxbury, the 9/11 attacks, Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti.

In 2015 for the first time, the runners held a pre-used sweater event that raised \$60 for the Loaves and Fishes charity in New Milford. A similar event has been scheduled for October 2016.

The series also has scheduled a fund-raiser called Seussical The Musical for March 12, 2016 to generate revenue for an upcoming theater production at Shepaug Valley High School. The runners also will be combining their efforts with the Minor Memorial Library on June 26, 2016 for Exercise Your Mind, a combined run/walk that will help increase awareness about the library's summer reading program.

The series started 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 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 for the recreation center and then in 2009 paid to trim the weeds around the sign and re-painted it.

The championship races are named after the first two head directors of the series – Dr. Burley and Dr. Kershner and former assistant director Mike Abraham.