Roxbury

Your community newsletter

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Cover photo by Jeb Wallace-Brodeur of SevenDays, Artwork in this issue by Students of Vermont Farm & Forest School: Abner, Gracelyn, & Graham

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We hope you enjoy it. © 2024 Roxbury Newsy



April-June 2024, Vol. 9 No. 2



Roxbury Finds Its Voice by Jackie Frazier and Hannah Bryant, organizers for Roxbury Voices

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." - Margaret J. Wheatley

Recently, our small town has been thrown into turmoil as the result of a failed school district budget in Montpelier. In reaction to this turmoil, a fellowship of Roxburians formed an informal group called Roxbury Voices. This group of parents, townsfolk, former students, and school staff came together to organize and fight for our children, our rights as a community, and the heart of our town: the Roxbury Village School.

Its advocacy led to formidable representation and publicity around the potential closure of the school, and it has given Roxbury a conduit through which to voice its frustration over the very sad, and now very official, School Board decision. After 170 years serving the communities of East and West Roxbury, the Roxbury Village School (RVS) will close at the end of this school year.

How did we get here?

Last year, the state passed Act 127 with the goal of allocating funding to schools based on average demographics and geography. The intent was to provide more equitable funding for students who need extra services in order to achieve successful outcomes. For example, districts with many English language learners or rural students would receive continued on page 2...

"Roxbury Finds its Voice" continued from front page...

higher per-student dollars from the state than districts with fewer students receiving extra services.

In theory, a town like Roxbury would have received more money as a result of this Act, however, due to our merger with Montpelier, our district will receive less per-student dollars despite the inclusion of our very rural community. As a result of receiving less funding from the state, in conjunction with escalating insurance costs for teachers and staff, the school board's initial budget proposal (in which RVS remained open) necessitated a 24% increase for Montpelier taxpayers. On March 6th (Town Meeting Day), the proposed budget was defeated in Montpelier.

The school board convened the next day to discuss strategies for quickly crafting a new budget that it hoped would be approved through a special election. A vocal group in Montpelier heavily lobbied the school board, insisting that it must close Roxbury Village School at once if they were to support any district budget. This put the board members in a very challenging position. They were under pressure to create a new budget that would maximize essential and valued services for all students (Roxbury and Montpelier) while significantly reducing costs in order to win voter support.

Out of this rapidly emerging situation, came Roxbury Voices. Our goal was to spread the word among the community about the call to close our school, to mobilize advocacy, and to strategize about what proposals would be best for our children and families, RVS staff, and the community as a whole, while recognizing that it was clear the school would not survive the state's new funding model.

Despite our best efforts, on March 20th, the school board voted to close the Roxbury Village School. The board recognized our community's expressed needs for improvements to the bussing schedule and routes, as well as after school care for next year. It has committed to quickly developing a committee to work through these logistics with the goal of providing families with critical information before the end of the school year in June. There is currently a call for community members to serve on this transition committee (www.mrpsvt.org/rvs-transition). A special election to vote on the current proposed budget is scheduled for April 30th.

While the decision to put forth a budget based on the closure of RVS has resulted in a lot of tears throughout the community, we are choosing to focus on the many silver linings— the clearest of which is a strong, unified voice of community members showing up to fight for this small town. As evidenced by the participants who spanned generations, socio-economic backgrounds, political divides, and good continued on page 6...

From the Town Clerk

2024 DOG LICENSES

It is time to license your dog(s). The deadline is April 1st. The cost is \$9.00 for a neutered dog and \$13.00 for an un-neutered dog. After April 1st the cost will be \$11.00 for a neutered dog and \$17.00 for an un-neutered dog. It is the law of the State of Vermont to license dogs annually. Owners of unlicensed dogs can be fined up to \$500 and/or the dog(s) could be impounded and destroyed. It is the law of the State of Vermont that all dogs are vaccinated every three years. The first vaccination is only good for one year. The newly-adopted, revised **Dog** Control Ordinance requires that penalties/fines be charged to the owners of unlicensed dogs. Please license your dog(s) so no fines will be issued to you.

TAXES

The next property tax installment is due on May 10, 2024. The office will be open until 5 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. The Town accepts postmarked envelopes.

SUMMER HOURS

Summer hours will begin May 3rd. The Town Office will close at noon on Fridays (except for the day property taxes are due). Summer hours will end the last Friday of September.

2024 TOWN MEETING

Town Meeting was held on March 5th. The minutes of Town Meeting are posted on the website, <u>roxburyvt.org.</u>

Officers that were elected on March 5th are:

Town Moderator – Lucinda Sullivan

Town Clerk – Tammy Legacy

Town Treasurer – Anne Maxham

Selectboard for 3 years – Dave McShane

Lister (3 years) – Bob Ketchel

Collector of Delinquent Taxes – Bill Hansen

Library Trustees – Carl Ellis

Auditor (3 years) – Jillian Abraham

Auditor (2 years) – Karen Tassinari

Cemetery Commissioner – Wendy Cashman

First Constable – Bill Hansen

Second Constable – Andy Apgar

There is a vacancy on the Board of Listers and on the Board of Auditors. Anyone interested in filling the vacancy should contact the Town Office at 802-485-7840.

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY Roxbury Results:

Republican Ballot: Nikki Haley -62, Donald Trump -81

Democrat Ballot: Joseph Biden - 102

The Montpelier/Roxbury School District meeting was also held

continued on page 6...

Roxbury Roots Volunteers!

Volunteers Welcome for Roxbury Roots Community Supper PREP & COOKING!

Calling community members of all ages who have a passion for food, cooking, and gathering! Whether you're a seasoned chef or simply enjoy lending a helping hand, your presence and support are invaluable. Roxbury Roots is seeking enthusiastic volunteers to join us in preparing upcoming Community Suppers.

Cooking and Prep Event: Thursday, April 25th, from 2:30pm to 7pm, at the Roxbury Community Hall/Senior Center.

Next Community Supper: Friday, April 26th, 5pm-7pm

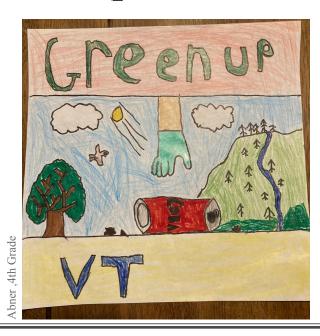
Upcoming Community Suppers: May 31st and June 28th

Stay tuned for Outdoor Community Events and Suppers this Summer! Send ideas to roxburyrootsvt@gmail.com
And follow along on social media: @roxburyrootsvermont

Vermont Farm & Forest School

Vermont Farm and Forest School (VFFA) puts the Earth first every day! We are looking forward to Earth Day and Vermont Green Up Day! Students created Earth Day posters, pictured throughout this issue of the Newsy.

Vermont Farm and Forest School's mission is to embrace academic and social learning through place-based education while cultivating a long-lasting connection with the community and the natural world.



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Green Up Day, May 4th Calling All Green Uppers!

Green Up Day is right around the corner, on Saturday, May 4th.

Pick up your bags from the town office or Claire's front porch (the house next to the school), leave them by the roadside when they're full, and help Vermont establish a world record in the Guinness Book for "most people picking up trash in a 24 hour period" (a record we hope to break in 2025!). Attend the free community lunch at the church (for everybody!) at noon, the library book sale, the craft fair at the firehouse, and maybe even a vocal recital at the church at 6 p.m.

Let your community spirit glow green-for-a-day...... and May the Fourth be with you!





MRPS Update

(Montpelier-Roxbury Public Schools) Kristen Getler and Rhett Williams

Hello Roxbury.

We write this month's update with incredible appreciation for our community, in awe of your organized support and love for the Roxbury Village School. Our hearts are also heavy. As many of you know, following months of wrenching budget deliberations and a failed budget on Town Meeting Day, on March 20th, a majority of the Montpelier Roxbury School Board voted to begin educating Roxbury elementary students at Union Elementary School in Montpelier starting next school year (2024-25) in order to arrive at a revised budget.

In this second board-approved budget, which will go before voters on April 30th, RVS would continue to be owned and maintained by MRPS for at least one year, however our elementary students would travel to Montpelier for their education. There are also funds for transportation, intended to minimize bus ride times from Roxbury to Montpelier, and funds for continuing afterschool care at RVS. Despite the latter efforts to minimize harm, we realize that this decision amounts to a categorical loss for our community and that we all want a thriving school at the center of Roxbury Village. We recognize and empathize with many of the things being felt by Roxbury, from outrage to sadness to hopelessness; we also know that for some, those reactions are mixed with hope and optimism.

The past few months have been extremely complex for the MRPS School Board. For those of you who have not been closely following along, here is an overview of how we got here. The board has been on a topsy-turvy roller-, coaster ride since September 2023 wrangling with unprecedented budget pressures, including big increases (16%+) in the cost of healthcare for district staff, increases in board-union negotiated staff salaries of 6% in fiscal year 2024 and 8% in 2025, and the implementation of Act 127, a piece of legislation intended to ensure fair distribution of education funds across districts based on the needs of students, where MRPS lost some of our share of the fund

Because the implementation of Act 127 would cause a decrease for some districts, it was originally designed to be implemented over 5 years, with a mechanism to financially protect districts most negatively impacted. The mechanism was a complete failure, as it incentivized districts to ramp up spending, believing they would be protected by the education fund.

While districts were approving budgets under 127 with great difficulty, the legislature realized that the overuse of the mechanism would decimate the education fund, and changed the mechanism at the eleventh hour. As a result, instead of MRPS getting a smaller share of the education fund in small increments over five years, MRPS would see the full impact of the law all at once. Having designed a strong budget to present to our community given one set of rules, we were suddenly given seven days to create a different budget based on different rules. We chose to present the budget to the community as it had been designed.

On Town Meeting Day, Roxbury and Montpelier voters voted on a \$32,046,114 budget that would result in an estimated 24% tax rate increase in Montpelier and an estimated 12% tax rate increase in Roxbury. That budget continued educating our youngest students at RVS, however that budget failed between the two communities by 253 votes (1,393-YES, 1,646-NO). In Roxbury, the budget passed by only 40 votes (179-YES, 139-NO) and lost in Montpelier by 293 votes (1,214-YES, 1,507-NO). The estimated 24% rate increase in Montpelier was too much to bear, and was voted down by their citizens. The failure of the first budget required the board to develop a revised budget. In this two week period, a public campaign to educate Roxbury's elementary school students at Union Elementary School was initiated by citizens in Montpelier. While it is impossible to know exactly the size of the campaign, many people pressured school board members to send all Roxbury students to Montpelier if the school board wanted the budget to

How was this allowed to happen? The voter-approved merger between Montpelier and Roxbury started on July 1, 2018. The merger document included the following paragraph: "A school could be closed during the first four years of operation only if approved by the voters residing in the town in which it is located. In years five and after, a school could be closed upon a majority vote of the Unified District School Board."

A Roxbury Village School Transition Committee, formed during the March 20th board meeting, will inform and facilitate the transition process to move students from Roxbury Village School (RVS) to Union Elementary School (UES) starting the 2024-2025 school year. The committee will be composed of students, community members, administrators, and school board members. They will make any recommendations to the board regarding strategies that may need fund balance money or board decisions. The committee will design and implement a process to engage the communities in both Roxbury and Montpelier. The committee will use the MRPS stated priorities as a guide, and base its recommendation on the following factors: educational considerations (including academics and safety, belonging, and wellness), financial considerations, and staffing

continued next page...

"MRPS" continued from previous page...

considerations. Particular strategies that will be considered by the committee include, but are not limited to, transportation, after school programming, and future use of the building.

An additional task of the transition committee will be to consider whether RVS has a future role in educating students in our district. Is there an alternative educational use for RVS? If an educational opportunity cannot be found, per our merger agreement the School Board can vote to officially close RVS, and MRPS would be required to offer the building back to the Town of Roxbury for the cost of \$1. Should Roxbury purchase the building back, what alternative uses of RVS would allow it to continue to be the heart of our community? As you can see, we will continue to need the voices of the community as this moves forward.

Right now, the future feels uncertain. However, the strength of this community feels solid. On March 24th, more than 100 people showed up to Roxbury Village School for a picture taken by a Seven Days photographer. The Roxbury community has been energized with a shared purpose and urgency. Community members organized and spoke on behalf of Roxbury, RVS, the education that was available there, and the importance of the school to our community. Transitioning our youngest students to Montpelier will be challenging. We hope the energy that came alive in defense of the school can be channeled to advocate for our students and their families.

We urge residents to remain curious and engaged with us and each other. We urge folks to be constructive and think kidsfirst. MRPS was not alone in facing a quagmire of budget challenges this year; 30% of Vermont school budgets voted on in March DID NOT PASS. This is unprecedented. We urge people to write to the governor and our legislators, telling them to articulate a future-forward vision for our state that creates a new education funding system which prioritizes our children and provides stability to our communities and tax rates. You can go to the state website to find Roxbury's legislators and their contact information (https://legislature.vermont.gov/people/). This may feel futile, but our legislators must understand what is happening in their communities and how their legislation plays out in reality. *Kristen and Rhett*

Kristen Getler (802) 498 8786 (<u>kristengetler@mpsvt.org</u>) Rhett Williams (802) 324 1180 (<u>rhettwilliams@mpsvt.org</u>)

Calling all Roxbury Kids!

Tell us what you did this year! Got a story to share? We want your artwork, poetry, photos, and writing to publish in the next Newsy.

Send it to librarian@roxburyfreelibrary.org

Volunteer Fire Department

April-June 2024

RVFD Outdoor Burning Reminder

Please note that burn permits are required when snow is no longer present at an outdoor burning site. Call Tim Martin, Fire Warden, at (802) 485-6555 or Don Randall, Assistant Fire Warden, at (802) 272-3330 to obtain a permit. For complete information on backyard burning and other fire related safety topics, click on this link under Roxbury Volunteer Fire Department (RVFD) on the Roxbury Town website: https://roxburyvt.org/our-roxbury-vt/roxbury-vt-fire-department/

The RVFD thanks voters for their approval of Articles 11 and 12 at the March town meeting. Your support enables the department to continue fire and emergency response, conduct training, and purchase safety equipment.

We continue to recruit new members. Meetings are held on second and fourth Sundays at 6PM in the fire hall.

Roxbury Senior Lunches have resumed at the Community Hall and Senior Center on Mondays at noon. Please contact Jack Cashman at 485-8915 to reserve a meal. Watch for menu postings on FPF!

Red Cross Shelter: The Roxbury Village School is an American Red Cross Emergency Shelter. The school now has a generator, which makes the building a great resource in case of an emergency. We have cots, blankets, and dried food stored at the shelter.

Tina Young is the coordinator, and can be reached at <u>tinayoung@mpsvt.org</u> or 262-1506. Please contact her if you would like to be added to the list of volunteers.

Roxbury Food Shelf: We are asking individuals in need of food to please contact Claire Chomentowski at (802) 485-7779. She will let you know how food may be picked up or, if necessary, delivered.

Roxbury Community Supper Schedule April 26, May 31, June 28 at the Community Hall

Food served 5-7pm

"Roxbury Finds its Voice" continued from page 2...

old-fashioned small town grudges, Roxbury SHOWED UP, truly exemplifying the tenacity and hard work this community is capable of. It has filled the children and staff at Roxbury Village School with a strong sense of community pride which they will carry with them as they transition together to Montpelier next year.

Now, our community has an opportunity to consider its future and how the historic school building and town hall may be utilized to contribute toward a vibrant village center. While we won't have kids building forts in the forest every Friday, or skating beside the town clerk's office during class, our kids will continue to come home to Roxbury every night and spend their weekends and summers in our hills. Let's consider how, as a community, we can continue teaching them the values of resilience, unity, and generosity toward neighbors that makes Roxbury so special.

Email <u>roxburyvt.voices@gmail.com</u> to be added to the contact list for future updates and organizing.

Church Rummage Sale July 4

Our annual church rummage sale will once again take place starting at 9 am on July 4th. Need to rehome your curios and tchotchkes, your knickknacks and novelties, your doodads and geegaws? Or most any other (gently used) item under the sun? We'll be collecting from mid-June on......call Claire (485-7779) for details, and help keep the church and the food shelf afloat.

Got a story to tell? We want to hear it!

We want to start a Story Project in Roxbury: the more we share our stories, the more we understand each other. If you have a story to share and would like to put it down in writing, contact Jane Pincus at aggiesmee@tds.net.

"Town Clerk" continued from page 2...

on March 5th.

School District Clerk – Tammy Legacy

School District Treasurer – Hillary Montgomery

School Director - Kristen Getler

The combination of Montpelier and Roxbury votes passed all except the budget. A new vote on the budget will be on April 30th at the Roxbury Town Office from 10am to 7pm.

The Central Vermont Career Center articles passed. The Central Vermont Career Center consists of four school

districts (eighteen towns). Since the ballots were co-mingled, there is no way to know how Roxbury voters voted.

2024-2025 PROPERTY TAX DUE DATES

At Town Meeting, the voters approved the dates the property taxes will be due. The dates are:

August 16, 2024, November 8, 2024, February 14, 2025 and May 9, 2025.

APPOINTED POSITIONS

The Roxbury Selectboard appointed the following:

Selectboard Chair - Jon Guiffre

Selectboard Vice-Chair - Rene Bouchard

Road Commissioner – David McShane

CV Transportation Rep – Gerry D'Amico

Town Health Officer – Craig Sullivan

Deputy Health Officer – John Valentine

Chairman of Civil Defense – Steve Twombly

CVRPC Representative – Gerry D'Amico

Roxbury Planning Commissioners – Elizabeth Carney and Dotti Guiffre

E-911 Coordinator – Rene Bouchard

CV Internet Representative – Tim Sullivan

Green-Up Day Coordinators – Claire Chomentowski and Kim Copeland

Emergency Management Director – Lenny Davis

Energy Coordinator - Nickolas Laskovski

There are more appointments to be made by the Selectboard.

SELECTBOARD MEETINGS

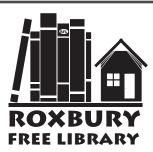
Roxbury Selectboard Meeting Minutes are posted on the Town's website, www.roxburyvt.org. If you are unable to attend meetings, you can keep up with what is happening in your town by reading the minutes or listening to the recordings of the meetings. At times there may be issues with the recordings and if that is the case, the recordings will not be posted. There is a new time for board meetings. On the 1st and 3rd Mondays of each month the Board will meet at 6:30 pm at the Community Hall.

GREEN MOUNTAIN PASSPORT PROGRAM

The Green Mountain Passport Program allows free day-use passes to Vermont State Parks and historic sites. If you are a Vermont resident at least 62 years of age or a Vermont veteran of the uniformed services you are eligible. To enroll in the program, you must complete an application at your Town Clerk's Office and pay a one-time fee of \$2. You will receive a Green Mountain Passport card which is good for life and is not transferrable. For more information contact the Town Clerk's Office at 485-7840 or stop by.

You can find town documents, meeting agendas and minutes, meeting warnings, and town governance information at the official town website: www.roxburyvt.org

April-June 2024



Roxbury Free Library Notes

A few notes of interest from Roxbury's longest running public library, the Roxbury Free. We would like to first acknowledge all the generous words and support that were directed at the RFL back on Town Meeting Day. We graciously thank you all! We would also like to remind you that the more you are all connecting with the RFL, the more chances we have of making more of those positive impacts. Don't be a stranger this spring, or ever.

Here at the beginning of April we are still marching through our "90 days of celebrating the last 90 years" of RFL operations. We hosted a well-attended birthday bash on March 17th and have more fun to come. We are inviting community members and beyond to the RFL for an informal oral history story sharing event in April to recount any and all stories of Roxbury. The final date will be announced soon. We are determining the date based on availability of those folks who indicate they are hoping to share some stories. Are you interested? Please let us know and we'll loop you into the planning process. The final event marking our birthday celebration in May will be launching a living community collection to show we are looking ahead at the next 90 years and not just living in the past. What is a living collection, you ask? The initiative is analogous to the "human library" movement where people can arrange to meet and interact with others in a safe and open environment. Ever wonder what it was like growing up in Roxbury 50 years ago? Come "check out" those stories. Not sure what life is like for a Veteran? Come ask! Have questions about life for immigrants living in Vermont? Well, you get the idea. Outside of the birthday fun, we have several other events over the next few months we want to bring attention to. Here is what you should be looking forward to:

For the **April 8th Solar Eclipse**, we are providing free glasses to anyone who needs them, as well as setting up a couple "viewing stations" around town that afternoon. So, even if you procrastinated, you still have a chance to enjoy the historical event close to home, no excuses. Expect to see tables with glasses and info at the RFL, both Parks, RVS, and maybe other locations as well. The **RFL book club is meeting on April 15** at the RFL for a discussion about both McBride's novel *The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store*, plus Gyasi's novel *Homegoing*. **On April 19, at 12PM the RFL and RVS will be**

putting together a book parade. That's right, all the RVS students will be turning themselves into their favorite book and marching through town to show it off. Safe to say you will not want to miss this parade. It's still tax season when you receive this edition of the *Newsy*, so please note that we have basic tax forms, computers, fax machine, and helpful staff ready to assist with your needs. We are planning to host the annual Green Up Day book sale on Sat. May 4. Details for dropping off books and hours of the sale will be posted closer to the event. Finally, we have hosted a July Roxbury Garden Tour for two years now, and would like to keep it going. So, we're always on the lookout for new gardens to add to the tour. Do you or someone you know have a garden you'd like to share with the community? Please let us know, as we'd love to get more stops on the tour route.

In the second half of May, we will have two introductory events to gauge interest from folks. First, a local family has been competing in Rube Goldberg fabrication contests, and will have their machine on display at the RFL. We are exploring hosting a regular group event to work on similar machines in the fall. Stop by, check it out, and let us know if it's something you might be interested in. Additionally, we are considering hosting a regularly recurring multigenerational current event discussion, Socratic investigation debate program. We know, the title's a mouthful, but chances are it will narrow down with interest and practice. For now let's just say, if you have any interest in getting together to discuss ideas in a respectful and intelligent way, stop in and let us know. Again, we'll host an informational event in May to capture ideas to start building the program for the fall. Is there something you have in mind for programs? Please let us know— we appreciate hearing suggestions. Talk soon.

Finally, the RFL Board has organized **another great fundraiser raffle in 2024**. You can purchase tickets at the RFL for \$5 each, or 5 for \$20. Raffle prizes include: A selection of beef from Flint Brook Farm, a round of golf at the Northfield Country Club, 1 Gallon of Maple Syrup, and gift cards to Bear Pond Books, Frazier's Greenhouse, Roxbury Country Store, and Woodbury Toys. All the ticket sale proceeds go to support library initiatives, like the *Newsy* you're reading here. The winners will be drawn at the Roxbury July 4th Celebration Book Sale.

On the topic of the RFL Board of Trustees, please be aware that the board is just now launching an effort to create a **Strategic Plan for the RFL**, and will soon be looking for input from you, the voice of Roxbury. More details forthcoming.

Wishing you all a great spring.

Your RFL staff: Ryan, Caitlyn, and Lisa

↑
roxburyfreelibrary.org | 485-6860 | librarian@roxburyfreelibrary.org

Roxbury Newsy

PO Box 95 Roxbury, VT 05669

Roxbury Crafters

Roxbury Community Crafters has just completed its 2nd season! We hosted 24 classes, taught by 14 volunteers, which were enjoyed by over 200 participants. It was quite a successful venture for our wonderful, small town.

Season 3 is in the planning stages, building on past accomplishments while adding new and interesting crafts to the schedule to be announced on our website soon. The craft classes are first offered to Roxbury residents (18 or older), then opened to neighboring town crafters as space permits. Classes are user friendly, with minimal or no prior experience necessary. The fee for each class is limited to the cost of materials, and often are at little or no cost.

This past December, Roxbury Community Crafters was awarded an AARP Vermont grant, which gave us the funding necessary to purchase basic supplies, and the financial encouragement to host our very first Craft Fair & Exhibit this coming Spring. Visit roxburyvt.com for more information, or scan the QR code!

The Newsy always welcomes new contributors. Please let us know if you have anything you'd like to share with the community, and we can get it into the next issue. Send questions and content to librarian@roxburyfreelibrary.org.

The Roxbury Community Crafter's Fair & Exhibit May 4, 2024 (Green Up Day) @ the Roxbury Fire Station, 9-3 pm



The fair will exhibit crafts completed during Seasons 1 & 2, as well as ideas for Season 3. There will be a small Gift Shop offering crafts for sale, including Mother's Day gifts, home decor, stocking stuffers for next holiday season, and more. There

will also be a Quilt Raffle featuring 3 unique, beautiful quilts which were donated to our organization as kits, pieced together by a dedicated volunteer, long-arm-quilted by Denise McMartin, and finished by even more volunteers! Tickets are \$5.00 each or 5 for \$20. We are hoping to have the quilts on display and the raffle tickets ready for sale soon.

Proceeds from the Craft Sale will be donated to a local charity later in the year. If you would like to suggest a local charity to donate to, please let us know.

We are crafters, friends, volunteers, and neighbors... we are Roxbury Community Crafters!