



## 2011 welcome speech Derek Lumpkins, Executive Director

Greetings!

As I celebrate the first anniversary of becoming Discover Roxbury's Executive Director, I've noticed a growing trend. More and more residents and visitors have been describing Roxbury as a "hidden gem" or as a "hidden jewel." While I understand that these comments are meant to be compliments, I've been hearing them so much lately that, for me, the terms have become clichéd.

But, there's more. Besides being clichéd, I find two faults with the phrases. First, involves the imagery. After hearing those phrases multiple times, I've begun to envision my grandmother's attic and sifting through old cardboard boxes covered with dust and cobwebs. In essence, the image isn't dynamic. The second issue is the message. "Hidden gem" and "hidden jewel" imply that someone purposefully tucked something away and made an effort to hide it. That, in turn, begs the question of who's hiding? I'm not hiding. Are you?

Roxbury sits in the geographic heart of Boston. We have world class hospitals, universities, and museums within and around our borders. On one hill we have a structure that, to some, looks like a lighthouse. On another hill we have a 7-foot tall bronze head which stands sentry over the neighborhood. We're not hiding. People just don't understand what they are looking at! As such, I'm done describing Roxbury as a "hidden gem" and I hope you are, too.

Instead, I'm proposing a new image.

Think of Boston as being like the ocean. It's dynamic, it's ever evolving, and it's teeming with life. There are all kinds of organisms in the ocean, things like sponges, crabs, lobsters, and starfish. But, I think of Roxbury as being like an oyster. Yes, an oyster! It's not the most glamorous creature in the ocean, but it possesses value far beyond its outward appearance.

Now, there are two ways in which someone might use an oyster.

First, someone might pick one up, pop it open, consume the content, and then be done. It's quick. It's easy. But, it's also a simple and easily forgettable experience.

However, someone more entrepreneurial would take an oyster, gently pry it open, and insert a small grain of sand. Once inside, the sand acts as an irritant and motivates the oyster to focus its time, energy, and resources, which eventually results in the production of a pearl. Pearls, as we know, are highly desirable and represent value and culture. A pearl is also valued more than the oyster itself. However, the very existence of the pearl demonstrates that the oyster, despite appearances, can produce value and therefore possesses its own intrinsic value.

So, how does this apply to Roxbury?

First, we can think of Roxbury as being like one big oyster. Over the centuries, it has produced numerous pearls such as John Eliot, Elma Lewis, Donna Summer, New Edition, and our very own Roxbury Puddingstone Awardees. Second, we can envision Roxbury as being like one big oyster farm, with hundreds of oysters each working on its own grain of sand, including everyone present today.

Thinking about Discover Roxbury specifically, we have several oysters at work, two of which are:

1. The High Notes of Jazz Roxbury, an oral history project where we interview our senior citizens and ask them to share their stories about Lower Roxbury's jazz clubs in the 1950s and their insights about possible connections between the jazz scene and the early Civil Rights Movement.
2. Our new partnerships with the Higginson-Lewis and Trotter Schools, which tie our Roxbury History Curriculum to the schools' initiatives in promoting health and wellness.

But, in order for us to harvest the most exquisite pearls possible, we need support in securing the necessary resources. We need your time, your energy, your talent, your introductions, and your dollars to cultivate quality and top value that we know exists in Roxbury.

With your help, no matter how deep or how wide the ocean, everyone – resident or visitor – who swims in these waters should know about our pearls and leave understanding that this oyster is special.

Thank you!