

## Looking for new guide to the Roxbury they love

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### Nonprofit historical agency seeks new leader, funding

By Meghan E. Irons, Globe Staff | May 21, 2010

Marcia Butman is leaving the house she built, the one with open doors to suburban families who had not otherwise set foot in a place like Roxbury.

Her “house” is Discover Roxbury, an organization that for 15 years has hosted excursions to Roxbury’s art galleries, hidden orchards, and historic landmarks in an effort to build community pride and break down race and class stereotypes.

Butman is stepping down, leaving a pall of concern that the bridges the organization built in the last decade and a half could crumble. “We are worried that when she leaves this will just die,” said board member Rodney Singleton.

Since its founding, Discover Roxbury has been changing the way people from across the state view Roxbury and even how Roxbury views itself. Its trolley, bike, and foot tours have opened a window into Dudley Square, Highland Park, and Blue Hill Avenue.

And those who tour the sites by trolley, van, or bike come back to dine, shop, and boost Roxbury’s cultural night life. The group helped to create the Roxbury Cultural Network and is working with Roxbury experts to compile a comprehensive history of the neighborhood.

Butman is widely thought of as the heart and soul of Discover Roxbury. But Discover Roxbury is limping along like other nonprofits in the shaky economy. With just \$50,000 in its budget, Butman said, it has enough to cover a new executive director’s full-time salary for one month. A search committee has been formed to find a successor, but that person must hit the ground running and begin fund-raising immediately.

“My wish is that we find the perfect person to step into some large shoes to develop a vision for Discover Roxbury,” said board president Ekua Holmes, who said at least 16 people have applied for the post.

How Discover Roxbury rebounds will depend on the strength of its board, whose members must remain vigilant about the organization’s goals, said Thomas McLaughlin, a vice president of the Nonprofit Finance Fund, which consults for charities.

“The challenge with founders is that they can tend to create an organization that puts them in the center of it, so if they pull out, that organization will hurt for a bit,” said McLaughlin.

Candelaria Silva-Collins, another board member, said that Butman’s departure is forcing the board to take an active role in the organization. Board members are now required to donate money; younger professionals are urged to join the board; and the group is boosting its youth programming.

“We just have to get more involved in how the organization is run because the director used to do everything,” said Silva-Collins.

Tired of the daily grind, Butman said she had a difficult two years after both her parents died, her father in October, her mother the year before. Now she wants a break from the demands of the job to spend more time focusing on research on Roxbury.

“It’s very difficult to run a nonprofit organization,” said Butman. “And I want someone else to run it.”

Butman said she is confident in the leadership of her second-in-command, Derek Lumpkins, who has been using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to increase youth participation in the programming and tours.

“Discover Roxbury is not just about one person,” Lumpkins said. “I don’t believe people in the community will just let it die.”

Butman, 64, began the tours in 1995 while living in Lexington and linking up with the METCO program.

The former schoolteacher noticed that while METCO children came into Lexington, few Lexington children were going to Dorchester, Roxbury, or Mattapan. "It was really one-way," Butman said.

A self-described 1960s radical, Butman used to help welfare mothers advocate for more respect and had taken her headmaster to court for blocking an assembly over the Vietnam war.

She held her first tour on April 1, 1995, with METCO families and students showing white families from Lexington around town. And she began offering more tours, first under the Bridges Program, which was renamed Discover Roxbury.

"One of my things from the beginning — and this is from the black power days — was that I wasn't going to come in here and say, 'Look how great Roxbury is,' " Butman said. "It was important that people who lived and worked here showed off their community, as well."

Nadine Nelson conducts food tours and takes patrons to orchards, markets, and community gardens.

"She's taken the organization to a great place," Nelson said of Butman. "Now this will allow another person to take it even further."

*Meghan Irons can be reached at [mirons@globe.com](mailto:mirons@globe.com). ■*

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