

## Community invited to catch 'The Spirit of Roxbury'

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Andrea Swain, executive director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston's Yawkey Club at its newly renovated location. Photo: Peter Van Delft

This Saturday, Sept. 16 from noon to four, residents both young and old from Roxbury and beyond are invited to the newly renovated Roxbury Boys & Girls Club to engage in celebration of the project's completion.

The club - now named the Roxbury Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston's Yawkey Club - takes its title from the lead donor, the Yawkey Foundation, which leveraged an anonymous donor's challenge grant to give a total of \$4.5 million to the club's \$8 million project. The renovation was funded by a total of 12 private donors and a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The renovated and expanded club, which lists more than 2,600 young members, now boasts 30 percent more space and can accommodate an additional 200 teens and 100 6-12 year-olds. During the construction phase, club members were accommodated at area schools that generously donated their space. Among those schools were the Dearborn Middle School, Orchard Gardens Pilot School, and the Madison Park Community Center.

The club is fully handicapped accessible with an outdoor ramp, new elevator, accessible bathrooms, and a pool lift for structured aquatics. In addition, the club offers an art room, complete with a kiln for pottery works and other crafts; a school aged child care center; a full commercial kitchen for providing nutritious meals; a computer clubhouse; a conference room for teens; a music studio; and many others. The pool has been retiled and a new dehumidification system has been installed to keep temperatures comfortable and the indoor gymnasium will be receiving a climbing wall as well as a refinishing of the basketball court in the near future.

Though these changes and improvements are certain to evoke excitement and appreciation from club members upon their return, it is the environmental and program-based improvements that have many of the club officials buzzing.

"We've wanted to do this for some time now," said Andrea Swain, Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston's Yawkey Club. "In the old space, children were dropped off in the parking lot and it was like being dropped in the street with all the cars coming and going through. This way, we have an actual drop off and pick up location that's safe for kids.

"And," continued Swain, "the old lobby was so dark and with the renovations, we've increased the amount of sunlight that comes in and the entire place is brighter and more appealing."

Swain joined the club as the Executive Director in March of 2001 after serving as Property Manager at Peabody Properties. She has also worked in the Boston Housing Authority where she worked with families and children at Mission Main and Orchard Estates. For Swain, the mission has always been about helping to provide services and recreation to kids in and around the community.

"This is going to be great for the kids because we now have the means to provide a really comprehensive list of services and recreation that we either lacked the space for or needed to improve upon. I think some of the returning members will be excited about some of the things we've added, and new members will really enjoy themselves.

"We are closing the digital divide with the computer club," continued Swain, extolling more of the virtues of the club. "These kids are learning many of the programs that they'll be able to use in the future in both the college and work setting. We've also added a first aid room off of the pool where kids can go and lay down and wait for their parents or ambulance. Before, in the other building, the kids would have to wait in the lobby with all of the kids coming and going around them and it wasn't comfortable and quiet for them. The new rooms are also going to be great for us. There was just a need for our 6-12 year olds to have their own dedicated space just as there was for our teens. The teens act as mentors in many situations and they interact, but when they want to hang out, they need a place of their own to relax and play in."

And when a member of the club needs guidance and assistance with larger issues that reach beyond the walls of the club, there will be people on site to lend a hand.

"We have a masters level social worker," said Jan Goldstein, Director of Marketing and Communications for the Boys & Girls Club. "They're full time here and they're going to offer extended life services, guidance, advocacy with agencies like the Department of Social Services and more."

To welcome the community to the new Roxbury Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston's Yawkey Club, the celebration on Saturday will feature face painting, food, treats from the Dancing Deer bakery, and tours for community residents and visitors who want to see firsthand the improvements that have been wrought on their neighborhood club. Members in other locales can, however, rest assured that change is on the way in the near future for other clubs in need of renovation.

"The next club to be redone will be the Blue Hill Boys & Girls Club on Talbot and Blue Hill Avenue," said Goldstein. "But it doesn't need as extensive work done as this one did. The clubs in Chelsea and Charlestown have been redone and we want to bring all of the Boys & Girls Clubs up to this level."

As testament to the viability of the improved space at the club, in April, the Roxbury Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston's Yawkey Club will host one of the signature events of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston - the Cyber Summit. This event features members from all of the Boston clubs - and some from around Massachusetts and Rhode Island - and showcases them at their best as they create and demonstrate various technological achievements to parents, visitors, and other members who are expected to pack the building.

For Swain, this event along with the grand reopening will be the culmination of her four years in the club spent dreaming of such a facility.

"We open officially on the 18th but Saturday is going to be special," said Swain. "This place has really come a long way. Of course, we can always use more new computers and we always need volunteers. But we're able to continue our mission of providing accessibility and affordability for our kids. This is a great time. I can't wait for the opening."