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## Restorative Justice Project Celebrates Fifth Anniversary April 10

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The Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast (RJP) will celebrate its fifth anniversary at Point Lookout in Northport on Saturday, April 10. With a theme of "Celebrating Second Chances," the fund-raiser will include a silent auction, cash bar, dinner and dancing to the Bel-Isle Jazz Group. Proceeds will benefit RJP's youth programs in area schools and juvenile court. Tickets are \$50 and are available by calling RJP at 338-2742.

In late 2003 Dr. T. Richard Snyder met with Waldo County Sheriff Scott Story to explore his interest in restorative justice. Snyder had recently retired to Northport after a career as a professor and dean at New York Theological Seminary. With Story's support, Snyder gathered a steering committee that worked for more than a year to create the Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast. In 2005 a part-time coordinator was hired and work began with inmates at the Waldo County Jail, juvenile offenders awaiting court hearings, and students at Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast. In 2007 RJP expanded to include Knox County.

Restorative justice, an alternative to the current criminal justice system, stresses repairing injuries done to victims of crime, holding offenders responsible for the harm they caused, offering alternatives to school expulsions and jail that are rehabilitative rather than just punitive, promoting healthy decision-making as a way to reduce recidivism, reintegrating offenders into the community, and engaging community volunteers (currently more than 60) as partners in restorative responses to crime.

RJP mentors have provided long-term help for scores of inmates as they re-enter the community, offered mentoring to dozens of offenders who have been referred to RJP rather than sent to jail, and worked with more than 80 juvenile offenders who were referred by probation, the courts, or law enforcement. In schools statewide, RJP is offering restorative measures and conferences as options to expulsions and suspensions for wrongdoing.

Story has integrated restorative practices into the county jail. The state's first male re-entry facility for inmates opened this winter in the former jail building. RJP has a contract with Volunteers of America, to train additional mentors for the re-entry facility in Belfast, which will help inmates from six coastal counties (from Washington to Sagadahoc) transition back to their communities. The organization now has three full-time staff and two VISTA workers who are developing programs and training volunteers to create restorative practices in Maine schools and institutions.

Snyder, Story and June Koegel, president and chief executive officer of Volunteers of America, NNE, whose agency works closely with RJP and Story on constructive options for offenders, will be honored at the April 10 event.