

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Mary Barnes 207-359-5053 or Judy Garvey 207-374-2437

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***Announcing: “Inside Art” – An Exhibit by Hancock County Jail Residents***

**“Wish I could be there to see how the art show goes. Please send me photos of opening night.” – George, artist**

**“I’m happy to have my name in full on my art. I’m not afraid of my past and don’t think it’ll be forgotten. I am confident it will be overlooked after I achieve my goals.” – Travis, artist**

**Volunteers for Hancock Jail Residents (VHJR)** invites the entire community to Maine’s first public *Art Exhibit by Hancock Jail Residents*. This not-to-be-missed exhibit – aptly titled “*Inside Art*” – will be on display at **The Grand, Ellsworth, ME, from June 7<sup>th</sup> – July 2<sup>nd</sup>**, beginning with an *Opening Reception, Thursday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 4-6:30 p.m.* The Reception is free and refreshments will be served. Art will be available at reasonable prices.

**Sherry Streeter and Mary Barnes**, visual artists from Brooklin and Sedgwick, have organized this unique gathering of art, with the assistance of VHJR’s volunteer art teachers, **Carla Rosenzweig, Linda White, Karin Hills, Mary Jellison, and Anne Williams**. While they have designed the Exhibit so that viewers experience the depth of beauty, intensity, and spontaneity of expression in the selections, they also anticipate that the distinctive show will stimulate healthy dialogue about incarceration in our communities.

In addition to a profound experience of art, the June 7<sup>th</sup> *Opening and Reception* will include the opportunity for conversations with artists who have served their sentences, discussions with VHJR’s art teachers and volunteers, and exhibit organizers.

“*Inside Art*” is a program of *Volunteers for Hancock Jail Residents (VHJR)* [www.jailvolunteers.org](http://www.jailvolunteers.org), 207-374-3608. VHJR is under the fiscal sponsorship of *Downeast Health Services*, a 501c3 charitable organization; donations are tax deductible.

Contributions are welcome and will assist in VHJR's jail programs, post-release activities, and plans for *The Landing*, a nonresidential post-release re-entry center.

*The Importance of "Inside Art". . .*

Too often, the meaning of jail time for communities is misunderstood or ignored. As a result, it can be a time during which the existence of those inside the cells is seemingly erased: *out of sight, out of mind*. With their individual strengths and abilities overlooked, jail and prison residents are often stereotyped in exclusively negative ways.

Reciprocally, this time of invisibility can breed shame in the jail residents themselves. They become labeled by the crime they committed, or are accused of committing; their place on this earth as human beings seemingly forgotten. This isolation and distancing may have unintended consequences, including continuation of addiction and recidivism.

Volunteers with VHJR, for six years now, have gone into Hancock County Jail to bridge this chasm of invisibility and negative labeling – attempting to ameliorate the alienation of community and jail residents from each other.

Regardless of the reasons for incarceration, VHJR volunteers are interested in incorporating our incarcerated citizens into positive roles in the community by providing restorative assistance. However, rather than entering the jail with the idea of "changing" anyone, volunteers are simply there to share community support, friendship, and a greater feeling of belonging.

What then could be more important for community and jail residents alike than a celebration of the gifts each has for the other? In "*Inside Art*," men and women who have experienced incarceration offer to their community works of art they have created. This extraordinary art show not only exhibits the work and talent of each individual artist, but also the love and pain, insight and passion in these works.

And on that night, too, our community offers to these jail residents its respect, attention, interest and acknowledgment. Acknowledgment, that is, of their humanness, talents, and strengths.

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