



Dismas of Vermont

Burlington

Hartford

Rutland

Winooski

Spring Newsletter 2024

Reconciling Former Prisoners With Society and Society With Prisoners Since 1986

Tim arrived at Rutland Dismas House in November 2022 with a longing for sobriety and the wish to reach his personal goals. He was given the opportunity to participate in the Rutland Treatment Court with its team of support: attorneys, treatment providers, and law enforcement. The goal of this alternative court is to provide positive reinforcement for meeting expectations and the tools for recovery. When a participant in Treatment Court continues to meet the requirements for a year, charges may be dropped or reduced.



On December 19, 2023, Rutland Dismas House celebrated the graduation of Tim Blanchard from Rutland Treatment Court, made possible with the backing of the Treatment Court team, everyone at the Rutland Dismas House, and his dedicated wife, Sue. Tim is pictured here with Sue on his milestone day, along with House Director Eric Maguire and fellow Dismas resident Ron. Tim can now focus on his next goal of starting his own business.

Congratulations, Tim!

2024

SPEAKER SERIES

OUR FINAL DATE



A PROGRAM OF DISMAS OF VERMONT, INC.



Recovery Vermont, Will Eberle, Executive Director

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2024, Noon, LIVE AND ZOOM

Over the past 24 years, Recovery Vermont has served as the hub for and champion of all things recovery in Vermont and has trained over 600 Recovery Coaches. Will brings a very personal experience with trauma and addiction and models neuroplasticity and resilience in his life and work.

free!

HELD AT THE HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ON ZOOM



The Hartford Dismas House celebrates ten years in 2024. Stay tuned for plans to celebrate in community our successes, hear from Dismas alumni, and honor the volunteers and advocates who have made it all possible.



RICHARD GAGNE: 40 YEARS OF COMMUNITY



Dismas of Vermont went through a strategic planning process a few years ago. In the final report, the consultants referred to a “Secret Sauce” that Dismas seemed to possess. It was described as secret because they could not precisely name it but they knew it was because of the vast and deep commitment they witnessed from so many. My own contributions to the sauce will conclude with my retirement in April, a history that began in 1985.

First, some history. Ten years before we opened Dismas in Vermont, Fr. Jack Hickey and a group of Vanderbilt University students in Nashville started the first Dismas House when they recognized that many men lacked two critical things when it was time to get out of prison: a place to live and family support. As such, the students decided to find a house that would be big enough for some of them to live in, invite men leaving prison who needed housing and support to join them, and live together in a family-like community. At the same time, the students recognized that former prisoners’ relationship with their community was broken because of the harm done by the crimes they committed and because of their sense of alienation resulting from the subsequent incarceration. They made the evening meal the center of their family-like community and invited members of the wider community to participate as volunteer cooks. Through their relationships with students and volunteer cooks who showed up month after month, Dismas residents experienced inclusion and acceptance ... and reciprocated. The word to describe this dynamic, which has and continues to be at the heart of the Dismas mission, is “reconciliation.”

I firmly believe that the critical ingredient of our “Secret Sauce” can be found in the simplicity inherent in our origin story. Dismas was not the product of a Vanderbilt Criminology professor who, after extensive research, analysis, and testing, developed a behavior modification-based model that would employ the skills of trained professional social workers. Instead, Dismas was born from the connection between ordinary students and regular prison inmates. Students were open-minded enough to recognize a need on the inmates’ part and open-hearted enough to do something about it. The Dismas community is compelling, not because of the sophistication of our techniques, but because of the profound depths of courage and compassion it calls its members to.

In the early fall of 1986, my first speaking engagement on behalf of Dismas was at the United Church of Underhill. The following month, a group of women from that church began volunteering to cook at Dismas House on Buell Street. Their message to residents was simple: “We care enough about you that we will enter into relationship with you.” That message, replicated night after night at the Dismas dinner table, leads to reconciliation and allows the healing of a broken relationship. The United Church of Underhill continues to volunteer monthly to this day. They still show up because the impact of reconciliation, as they experience it, is compelling. And it has been compelling enough for me to conclude, quite some years ago, that the work of Dismas was not my job but my vocation.

TWO SETS FROM
**KAT
WRIGHT**



May 4
DOORS AT 6:30
ELLEY-LONG
MUSIC CENTER
COLCHESTER


A BENEFIT FOR
 Burlington
Dismas House
A PROGRAM OF DISMAS OF VERMONT, INC.

FOOD TRUCKS! CASH BAR! COMMUNITY AWARDS!
THIS 37TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY CELEBRATION SUPPORTS PEOPLE
RETURNING TO OUR COMMUNITY AFTER INCARCERATION.


TICKETS ON SALE NOW \$50 online
WWW.SEVENDAYSTICKETS.COM \$65 at door



Questions? Call 802-658-0381



Honoring Richard Gagne with the Jack Hickey Award for his 40 years of service to the Dismas mission.



Honoring the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction with the Ann Atherton Award for exceptional volunteerism.

2024 BURLINGTON HONOREES

Fr. Jack Hickey Award

Richard Gagne for 40 years of service



The 2024 Jack Hickey Award is being presented to Richard Gagne. The award is named after Fr. Jack Hickey OP, founder of the original Dismas House in Nashville, TN, in the mid-1970s. In 1985, Richard joined the group of Vermonters, spearheaded by Rita McCaffrey, who opened Vermont's first Dismas House. After working directly with Fr. Hickey to open the first house on Burlington's Buell Street, Richard became the first House Director; his young family lived in the house for its first two years. Richard found his vocation and has served as a House Director for the past 40 years. In 2008, after working with Dismas volunteers and Winooski city officials to open East Allen Dismas, Richard became its House Director. Richard likes to think of himself as the Dismas "philosopher" as he has always had a special concern to ensure that the structure, policies, and practices of Dismas are grounded in the core Dismas principle of reconciliation. Richard retired from Dismas in April 2024 and plans to work at making furniture and creating sculptures from his home workshop in Cambridge, VT.

Ann Atherton Award

First Congregational Church of Essex Junction



The First Congregational Church of Essex Junction has been generous as Dismas volunteers and donors for over fifteen years. Pastor Mendes created the program Mission Possible to become more hands-on in the community. For over five years, Ed Steele has been its lead, and after the lockdown of 2020, was one of the earliest volunteers to return to the East Allen Dismas House. Ed invited Justin Adair, Assistant House Director at East Allen, for services, who accepted and found the same warm, engaging spirit sitting in the pews that Ed brings to our table. Since Mission Possible's inception, we are grateful that the church has faithfully provided our residents sustenance, camaraderie, and forgiveness.



For the second year, Hartford Dismas House enjoyed a snowmobile tour with Snowmobile Vermont and a weekend away. Residents shared meals around a large table and reveled in the cozy comfort of a wood stove and a hot tub. Each and every resident expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to spend time outdoors, recuperate from the complicated emotions that holidays can bring, and enjoy the natural high that snowmobiling offers. Your support of the Hartford Dismas House makes this possible -- thank you. Sometimes it is the little things that leave the biggest mark.

A BENEFIT FOR



THE 32ND ANNUAL DINNER & AUCTION CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2024

SPARTAN ARENA - RUTLAND

3:30 DOORS OPEN 5:00 LIVE AUCTION & DINNER



\$75 tickets in support of second chances and reconciliation
RSVP before May 10 - sorry, no tickets at the door
Buy tickets at www.dismasofvt.org or call 802-775-5539

SILENT & LIVE AUCTION RESIDENT SPEAKERS COMMUNITY AWARDS

Fr. Jack Hickey Award

The Rutland City
Police Department



Honorary Chair

Richard Gagne for
40 years of service



Loving Spoonful Award

David Perry & the Christ
the King Students



Mary O' Award

Rutland Treatment
Court



MUSIC FROM
BREANNA
ELAINE



MENTALIST &
MAGICIAN
PETER GROSS



2024 RUTLAND HONOREES



Fr. Jack Hickey Award

The Rutland City Police Department



As noted on the Rutland City Police Department website, they are "dedicated to protecting and serving our citizens through professionalism, courtesy, compassion and community partnership." Day in and day out, the Rutland City Police Department provides essential services to the neighbors of Rutland City that help our community stay safe. Recent years have been very difficult for the Rutland community with the supply of opioids readily available and the destruction that follows. We are thrilled to present the Fr. Jack Hickey Award to the Rutland City Police Department for their unwavering commitment to saving lives and keeping our community safe without judgment or bias.

Honorary Chair

Richard Gagne for 40 years of service



Three words that best describe Richard Gagne are wisdom, commitment, and blessing. He served on the Burlington Dismas House Planning Committee in the mid-'80s and became the first Dismas House Director in 1986. In 2024, Dismas of Vermont has grown with five houses in four communities, largely due to his commitment to training all of us in the Dismas mission of reconciliation.

Mary O' Award

Rutland Treatment Court



The Rutland Treatment Court is a voluntary program for individuals with substance use disorders and provides a wonderful support system for those who are given the opportunity to participate. People who successfully complete the program often have their charges dropped or reduced. The Rutland Treatment Court has collaborated with both the Women's Dismas House and the Rutland Dismas House to assist residents in meeting the expectations of the program and their personal goals. We are thrilled to present the Mary O' Award to the Rutland Treatment Court as they continue to "beat the drum for Dismas."

Loving Spoonful Award

David Perry & the Christ the King Students



The third Tuesday of the month at the Rutland Dismas House is extra special thanks to David Perry and Christ the King School eighth-grade students, especially Izzy Smith, Greta Courcelle, Peyton Rider, Cash Fortier, and Carmody Fortier. Thank you for nourishing the body and heart of Dismas. You can hear David reinforcing math skills in the kitchen as dinner is prepared. "If the recipe calls for 1/3 cup and we need to make a double batch, how much will we need to use?" Every student assists with the main course, but their chewy chocolate chip cookies are the crowning glory. The conversation is lively at the table among students and residents, the Dismas mission of reconciliation in action.

ERIC: APPROACHING LIFE WITH GRATITUDE AND IN SERVICE

Born and raised in Vermont, Eric returned in an unsuccessful attempt to get clean and instead was arrested for assault and robbery with injury. On December 19, 2023, after 15 years incarcerated, he arrived at East Allen Dismas in Winooski. In the weeks and months before his release, he was most fixated on where he would live, how he would re-adjust back into society, and where he would work. "Because of my age (he's 53), my crime, and my years on the inside, who was going to hire me, if anybody?"

Eric was honest about his past with the folks who called him from Floor Covering International about his job application: "I didn't want to waste anyone's time." Their response was heartening and challenged his fear of rejection: Everyone deserves a second chance. Bonus: They knew of him because of his good work laying tile almost two decades prior, remembering his fine technique.



After just a couple of months at Dismas, Eric is surprised by how good he feels. "I never want to take anything for granted again." Even on his most stressful days, he is grateful, "I'm not in prison anymore, I'm at work, I have money in my pocket. Starting all over, I'm just going to do the best I can every day." His best includes being very protective of his sobriety (he's been clean for years), which is why, at first blush, he was wary of Dismas' policies around relapse. He said, "I've come to terms that no matter where I am, people are going to use, people are going to relapse. If I ever slip up, I'd want another chance; I'm only human."

We spoke about the difference between Dismas and typical halfway houses. Recognizing that part of his journey is learning to live in society again and take care of himself, Eric likes that he can make his own way at Dismas and appreciates this approach over one more prescriptive. Our conversation led to the weeknight dinners prepared by volunteers, a Dismas tradition he didn't initially love. "I get it now, it isn't just about everybody getting there to eat, it's about being a community. We all don't see eye to eye, but I've gotten to a point where I care about everyone here at Dismas." Instead of each to their own, Eric is inspired to ask, "How can I help?"

A strong proponent of everyone doing their part, Eric is doing interior painting at the East Allen Dismas House and serves as a Resident Advisor there. Outside of the house, he's interested in serving others because, at the time of his crime, "I scared the community." This awareness, in tandem with a desire to walk in the footsteps of his mentor and grandfather, has him wanting to find volunteer opportunities that will further his commitment to amends. Looking ahead beyond Dismas, he's working with associate house director Justin to make a longer-term financial plan to save money while also paying back child support. When he reflects at the end of each day, Eric considers how he can do better the next day and do right by his kids and family.

***"I'm really glad that I came here because I almost didn't.
The opportunities are endless."***

KALMOI: BALANCING PASSION WITH PATIENCE

Sitting in his cell prior to his release, Kalmoi had two options that would reconnect him with his daughters: find a place to give him a second chance or stay in jail until he could secure a place to live and recover his misplaced documents. The latter, he knew, would likely mean a return to jail for a new crime because he had no support. “I knew I wanted to get to my daughters, but first I needed a roof and my documents. I’m not from here and I had no one to help me – it was just me and my daughters.” Dismas changed that for him.

He arrived at Dismas in January 2023. “When I stepped in the door, I felt relief. I breathed in the air of family – the air that was circling in the atmosphere was phenomenal. I was surprised.” If you can’t tell by his beautiful use of language, Kalmoi is a poet, a weaver of words.



More than a year later, Kalmoi reflects that “the whole house has supported me in ways I couldn’t have even imagined. I can’t point to one person because one leads to another. Dismas has given me the support I needed to get my life together. Now I see my kids.” This reunification was made possible after months of work by the Local Council of volunteers that serves Burlington Dismas, a member of the Council who volunteered her legal expertise, and the support of his COSA team and University of Vermont students.

“I see my daughters every weekend. I have something to look forward to, and Dismas has helped me do that. I have put in a lot of work to be passionate and patient.” Kalmoi shared that he embraced this philosophy while incarcerated through re-entry preparedness programming and continued cultivating it post-release, with the help of his COSA team, and added: “we all have the capacity to learn from our past, not with regret but through forgiveness.” Anyone familiar with the Dismas model can see why Kalmoi is such an outstanding fit for the Dismas family. This fit has earned him the title of Resident Advisor at Buell Street Dismas and a Local Council member.

His determination not to return to jail is where he finds strength, and that strength stems from his commitment to his daughters, Sabrina and Warsan. Kalmoi has always taken pride in being a good father and a good role model. He refuses to follow a path that won’t serve him and his daughters.

Kalmoi shared that he passed on an offer for a bed at East Allen Dismas House in Winooski because Winooski is where he was arrested and would likely fall back into old patterns. Instead, Kalmoi chose to wait for a bed at Buell Street Dismas, “where my mind could be free.” He is finishing his GED, has a car he’s proud of, and manages the wash bay at Vermont Tent Company. Longer term, he hopes to be able to continue his education and become an electrician; he’s already completed a weatherization course.

Next to his daughters and his job, his priority is living a life of mutual respect. Across all the stories that he shared, it is clear that Kalmoi walks with reverence ... and that he is an incredibly hard worker who takes pride in being a grateful father with a good heart.

A Legacy of Giving

Contributed by Rita McCaffrey

Bob Tappan Foley, 92, of Philadelphia, PA, and North Hero, VT, died at his home on January 16, 2023. He and his late wife Priscilla were longtime friends and benefactors of Dismas of Vermont and many other Vermont and Pennsylvania non-profit organizations. We are deeply grateful to the Foleys, for their belief in the Dismas of Vermont mission of reconciliation and for benefitting from the Foley's most generous gift of \$500,000 from Bob's estate in honor of Rita and Frank McCaffrey.



Priscilla, her sister Susan, and four other siblings grew up across the street from Rita Whalen McCaffrey, in Lexington, MA, in the '40s & '50s. Each summer, Rita would visit Priscilla's family for a few weeks at their summer cottage at Sagadahoc Bay in Georgetown, ME, originally a "bare bones" Girl Scout Camp run by their grandmother in the '20s and '30s.

Years later, when Priscilla's mother died, Rita and her husband Frank gathered with the family at the cottage for a Celebration of Life to honor her. There, Priscilla introduced them to her husband, Bob Foley, and they learned she and Bob lived in Philadelphia and spent summers at his family home in North Hero. That was the beginning of renewing their childhood friendship, and each summer, they would visit each other, either at the Foley's in North Hero, at the McCaffrey's in Weston, or somewhere in between; Rutland, Middlebury, or Burlington. A few years after their reunion in Maine, Rita invited them to have dinner at Buell Street Dismas House in Burlington, which introduced them to the Dismas community over a shared dinner with the formerly incarcerated around the large, friendly dining room table.

The Foley's generosity through life was considerable, including personally mentoring several Philadelphia families for several years, recent arrivals to the United States from Vietnam and China, and generous supporters of the arts.

Generosity like that of Priscilla and Bob Foley is what provides Dismas of Vermont the long-term stability to compassionately offer support to those ready to embrace another chance.

Will you join them?

Making an estate gift to Dismas of Vermont can be as simple as adding a sentence to your last will and testament or adding us as a beneficiary to a life insurance policy. Jim Curran, Executive Director, would be honored to start the conversation with you (jim@dismasoft.org).



Paws-itive Contributions on Park Avenue

Residents at Park Avenue are known for being good neighbors -- maintaining the garden, assisting with projects, and being generally neighborly. What we didn't expect was a cry for help from across the street to free a kitten stuck under a metal railing. The situation called for some careful, thoughtful planning.

After deliberation, House Director Eric and residents Tim and Josh had a strategy in mind. The team made a quick run to the Rutland Dismas House for the right tool for the job; soon, the kitten was joyfully scampering away for its remaining eight lives.

Reconciliation between the formerly incarcerated and the community is a two-way street. The call for help reinforced the value of our existence and provided an invitation for us to contribute positively. It is often the little things -- the small moments -- that leave the biggest mark. How will you extend reconciliation in 2024? Dismas of Vermont can help you answer that question with a variety of volunteer opportunities at one of our houses in Burlington, Hartford, Rutland, or Winooski.

Ready to learn more? www.dismasoft.org/get-involved/volunteer.html