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Finding Connection at Dismas is a Two-Way Street

Joyce Mechling has been a part of the Hartford Dismas House since before it opened. At first, "All I knew was that there was this great-sounding opportunity. Initially, I was just a warm body showing up to get the house ready: painting, cleaning, and outfitting. The more I learned, and the more residents I met, the more involved I got."

Since the house opened in 2014, she has been a faithful Volunteer Cook, served on the Local Council, sat on the Board of Directors, and, most recently, became Volunteer Staff. Her primary interest has always been her time with residents. It isn't unusual to see Joyce at the Dismas dinner table two or three times a week.



Joyce's commitment is to the residents, but the value of the connection is a two-way street. In appropriate conversations, she freely shares that she has major depressive disorder and has been living in recovery since the late 80s. "More than once, I've felt myself going downhill, which usually means hospitalization, and so I've volunteered to show up for dinner at Dismas. Here I feel a sense of community, know what is expected, am always welcomed, and my absence is noticed. In many ways, Dismas is my safety net."

Joyce doesn't go into all her experiences around mental health and substance use with Dismas residents, but she is forthcoming about her story, as many residents have parallel experiences. It is her way of modeling talking about things that are hard and often carry stigma and feelings of shame. "I embrace who I am as this is my path, and there are ways to move forward despite everything; this is what I try to share with the guys. And at dinner during gratitudes, I always say that I'm grateful for my sobriety, because I want them to know that I have been there with them."

Joyce has experienced the highs and lows of life. She was the first woman to get a PhD in engineering from Dartmouth. She raised a family. She worked as a civilian for the Army and the federal government. She experienced divorce and lost a child to suicide. In retirement, she works with students preparing to become doctors, physician assistants, and nurses, aiming to help them become compassionate practitioners. "I don't want to be happy; I want to be content. Being content means finding value through meaningful ways to contribute. Dismas is vital for me in feeling valued and appreciated."

Joyce is one of ~300 Volunteer Cooks at Hartford Dismas House. "Providing dinner every weeknight is a way to acknowledge that residents are valuable. And in return, they are grateful. At dinner, we go around the table and say what we are thankful for. To a newcomer, it sounds scripted, but the gratitude is genuine."

Joyce is a subtle ambassador for Dismas; her strategy for getting other community members involved always starts with an invitation to join her at the Dismas dinner table. These invitations invite questions and curiosity that ultimately stem from societal stigma, and Joyce gently challenges those stigmas. "So many people don't understand the hard work the guys put in to make the transition back into the community, and that Dismas residents often have ties to the Upper Valley. These are our neighbors."

Home is Where Love is Found

Thanks to community donors and resources, including the Shelburne Social Services Committee, Lowe's Hometowns, and ReSOURCE Vermont, East Allen Dismas House in Winooski and Buell Street Dismas House in Burlington now have refreshed furnishings.

But money doesn't buy love, which is where Council Member Beth Warren and her eye and expertise for comfort and style come in. She said, "I love to do this type of work, and I feel strongly that everyone should live in an environment that feels comfortable and inspires us to be our best selves."

While Beth was familiar with Dismas through her membership at the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction, her active involvement began as a Volunteer Cook in 2024 after the sale of her business afforded her more time.

Beth shared, "I believe in the mission to help residents assimilate back into society and understand what a daunting task that can be for someone who may have challenges around Substance Abuse Disorder or any other variety of issues. Support is essential for formerly incarcerated persons to move forward. The houses are run by outstanding staff who are thoughtful, caring, and empathetic, yet can also maintain necessary boundaries. I appreciate that the houses feel so hopeful, and I've had countless positive interactions with the residents."

Beth has a long history as a stylist, which began in the home improvement industry as a designer of sunrooms, decks, and awnings, evolved into custom closets, and then to professional organizing and staging.

Styling East Allen and Buell Street, Beth carefully considered how to create spaces that feel masculine yet also like home. She engaged a couple of residents who helped move furniture, hang window treatments, and generally advise how the projects came together. Beth said, "I'm appreciating my role as a volunteer can take many different forms at Dismas, and this project especially felt good."



Welcome to our Newest Dismas Staff



Amanda Capron
East Allen Dismas House
Assistant Director



Charity Coon
Women's Dismas House
Assistant Director

Amanda Capron brings a degree in social work from the former Trinity College and 25+ years of related experience, including work with behaviorally challenged teens and domestic and sexual abuse survivors. Most recently, she was the assistant director of social services at a nursing and rehabilitation facility.

Charity Coon comes to Dismas from Killington Resort, where she served as director of the Childcare Center for 9 years. Dismas will undoubtedly benefit from her skills as a program director and her varied education, ranging from Green Mountain College to the New England Culinary Institute.



The 34th DINNER AUCTION

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 2026
KILLINGTON GRAND HOTEL
KILLINGTON, VERMONT



buy
TICKETS
NOW

IN-PERSON AUCTION!

Big ticket items, desserts, and plants

ONLINE SILENT AUCTION!

The online auction opens in early April

ROCKING CHAIR RAFFLE!

All-wood Vermont Folk Rocker, \$2,000 value



Rutland Dismas House Women's Dismas House

\$100 TICKETS & SLIDING SCALE OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE

Registration, silent auction, and socializing
begin at 4:00. The program starts at 5:00.

Call Tatiana with questions or to inquire about
sliding scale tickets: 802-855-8740



Featuring a performance by
folk musician John Flynn

COMMUNITY AWARDS!



**Rutland
Neighbors:**
Fr. Jack Hickey
Award



**Heidi Root
& Gil Healy:**
Mary O'
Award



**The Knights
of Columbus:**
Loving Spoonful
Award



An Update from Sam

Sam was featured earlier this winter for her reflections on addiction and recovery. She continues to make progress and is currently working through Dismas of Vermont's Step-Down Housing Program eligibility checklist. Her goal is to move from the family-style living environment at the Women's Dismas House into a Dismas-leased apartment in Rutland.

"Dismas has made it possible for me to achieve my goals and truly take Treatment Court seriously in my life. I'm currently in Phase 4 of Treatment Court, which means I'm getting closer to the end of the program. With five total phases, this stage reflects how far I've come and the work I've continued to put into my recovery. The structure, accountability, and support I've received at Women's Dismas House have given me the stability I needed to stay focused, follow through, and believe in myself. Because of that foundation, I'm now preparing to transition into the Step-Down Housing Program, where I will move into my own apartment and continue building an independent, healthy life. Dismas helped me build the foundation for a life I'm proud of."

Dismas of Vermont serves more than 100 people annually through family-style congregate housing and step-down apartments, at a cost of \$35,594 per person.

The latest numbers from the Vermont State Legislature report that it costs \$134,218 annually to incarcerate a person in Vermont.

It pays dividends to support Dismas. Thank you.



Buell Street
Dismas House East Allen
Dismas House

The 39th Community Celebration

Delta Hotel, South Burlington, Vermont

Sunday, April 26, 2026 - 12:00 - 3:00

SPEAKERS!
COMMUNITY AWARDS!
SILENT AUCTION!
A DELICIOUS BUFFET!



Questions? 802-658-0381

In Memory: Roger Gibeault

Roger Omer Gibeault passed away on September 23, 2025. Rita McCaffrey shared that she met Roger 55 years ago through a church connection. Roger was interested in bringing programming to the Chittenden Community Correctional Center, specifically a 12-week program that taught decision-making and problem-solving skills by trained community volunteers. This interest later became a reality with Rita's guidance as the coordinator of a similar program at the Rutland facility. Roger was energetic for causes he believed in.

Fortunately for Dismas, Roger stepped up to work on the Burlington Dismas House Planning Committee. Hardworking and most dependable, he attended all the meetings and brought new volunteers and resources, making it possible to open the Burlington Dismas House in 1986.

Roger served on the early Dismas Board and later became Board President for two terms. He worked on the Maintenance and Fundraising Committees for many years, and he and his wife, Hazel, were monthly Volunteer Cooks the first year; Roger continued cooking after Hazel's passing. Several years later, he married Mary McGinley, and they continued as Volunteer Cooks until their early 90s. In addition, Roger and Mary held an annual plant sale at their home for 14 years and donated proceeds to Dismas. Roger loved the plant sale and was the driving force; at his service, his family talked about the plant sale and what it meant to him.

Rita said, "Roger was one of many reasons that Dismas of Vermont's first house flourished, due to his deep commitment and joy, working to provide transitional support to the formerly incarcerated. We will miss him."

Roger was an avid gardener with a green thumb, an activist for social justice, an avid reader, an enthusiast of watercolor painting, and, in his 60s, a lover of sailing. Roger delighted in traveling with Mary, and they enjoyed trips to Europe, Mexico, and El Salvador. Roger devoted his time to his wife Mary, family, friends, and the causes he believed in.



Dismas in the News



"But first, I want to take you to Buell Street [Dismas House] in Burlington. Because, in the face of all sorts of pressure from NIMBYs and tenuous funding, one of the original transitional homes from the '80s is still welcoming new residents." Thank you to Brave Little State for visiting Buell Street and exploring the history, challenges, and successes of transitional housing. Photo by G. Russell, VTDigger.



The Vermont Magazine article "Amazing Grace: How Rita McCaffrey built an enduring community of second chances through her work with Dismas of Vermont" is honest, grounded in reconciliation, and a lovely illustration of the heart behind four decades of work in Vermont to support people returning to our communities.

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PO Box 156

Hyde Park, Vermont 05655



ANNUAL CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2026

Cornerstone Community Center, Hartford, VT



**WITH COMEDIAN
MICHAEL PETIT & FRIENDS
DAVE DECKER AND STEVE SCARFO**

Join us to honor residents,
volunteers, and supporters
with gratitude, laughter,
and good company.

**Doors open at 6:00
Program begins at 6:30**

***Community awards!
Hearty hors d'oeuvres!***

Questions? 802-698-8661



This event is ***FREE*** for
volunteers and donors.
Tickets available for the public.

RSVP now!