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MEDIA RELEASE

"Building Opportunity"

A partnership between Harford Habitat for Humanity, Harford County Office of Drug Control Policy and the Harford County Sheriff's Office

(Harford County, MD - June 17, 2009) - Harford County Sheriff's Office, Harford Habitat for Humanity and Harford County Office of Drug Control Policy have partnered to create an inmate training program for low risk offenders designed to provide job and life skills training to Harford County Detention Center inmates, while reducing recidivism and developing affordable housing for safer communities. The goal of the 16-week pilot program "Building Opportunity" is to assist ex-offenders with reentry into the Harford County Community.

In 2007, Sheriff L. Jesse Bane announced the development of a comprehensive, long-term plan to address crime in Harford County based on the *Compstat* model. Harford County's *Compstat* version, *Countystat*, is a public safety strategy and modern policing concept that establishes crime specific objectives and effective strategies to achieve identified objectives. Through *Countystat*, one strategy developed by the Harford County Detention Center Bureau was to provide a credible, offender targeted program intended to reduce recidivism. For some individuals, criminal activity leading to incarceration is an isolated event - it happens once and for a short time. For others, a small minority, criminal activity is part of a chaotic and uncertain way of life. These individuals tend to cycle in and out of jail. When they do return to the community, it is likely to be to the same unstable

lifestyles, and they often return to criminal activity. However, individuals who are able to participate in sustainable work in their community are more likely to abandon criminal behavior permanently. "Building Opportunity" offers a credible, offender-targeted program intended to get them into stable work habits, address their criminal thinking and behaviors, and assist them in stabilizing their lives.

The 16-week program "Building Opportunity" has taught the participating inmates hands-on construction skills at the Harford Habitat build site located at 400 Warren Street in Aberdeen, MD. Harford Habitat for Humanity has provided a trainer for technical construction skills. In addition to weekly classroom training at the Harford County Detention Center, the Harford Habitat trainer along with Detention Center maintenance supervisor oversees the field training and implementation of the inmates' new skills at the Harford Habitat for Humanity construction site.

The Harford County Office of Drug Control Policy provided the third piece of this pilot program. Their role was to educate offenders, identify errors in thinking, behavior modification through critical thinking, and assessment. "Building Opportunity" inmates participated bi-weekly throughout the duration of the program in the Commitment to Change program developed by Dr. Stanton Samenow and instructed by William Kelly of the Office of Drug Control Policy. This program teaches the inmates to identify criminal thinking, thinking that could bring harm to themselves and others, and to replace criminal thinking with responsible thinking. They used their worksite experience as material to evaluate the potential errors in their thinking.

Inmates selected to participant in "Building Opportunity" agreed to commit to 100 hours of on-site volunteer service to Harford Habitat for Humanity, 32 classroom hours on basic construction, and 32 hours of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

provided by the Office of Drug Control Policy. An inmate risked being removed at any time from the Building Opportunity Program for failing to meet the minimum program requirements. The inmates were carefully screen before being accepted in to the program. A part of that criterion was determining that they could be safely managed in a community setting. Offenders with a criminal history of violence, sex offenses, escape, attempted escape, felony theft or pending charges were not eligible for participation. In addition, inmate participants selected had to be sentenced a minimum of four months to the Harford County Detention and be recommended for work release participation by the courts.

Throughout the 16-week program inmate participates were monitored to ensure they meet the requirements of the program as well as assess the impact the program was having on them. Prior to their release from custody and after the conclusion of their 16 weeks, the participants will be asked to review the overall program for themselves and answer questions such as, would they recommend the program? In addition, what suggestions for improvement can they offer? Scheduled for finish on July 8, 2009 with the completion of the home at 400 Warren Street, the Harford County Sheriff's Office, Harford Habitat for Humanity and the Office of Drug Control Policy representatives will assess the Building Opportunity Program and collectively determine whether the project should continue.

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Harford County Sheriff's Office Mission

With courage, honor and integrity we protect the rights and dignity of all citizens. In partnership with our communities, we strive to preserve the peace and provide for a safe environment for all.