



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release: November 16, 2007 - see photo attached.

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PARTNER OF THE YEAR AWARD PRESENTED TO WASHINGTON COUNTY: ONE COMMUNITY

HERMON - Maine Rural Partners (MRP) announced the winner of its 2007 Partner of the Year Award at its annual meeting in Hermon on Thursday. This award is made each year to the organization that demonstrates the greatest degree of collaboration among diverse public and private sector stakeholders within any of MRP's activity areas. The 2007 award was conferred upon *Washington County: One Community*, a regional community-building project initiated by the Washington County Commissioners in 2006.

According to Mary Ann Hayes, MRP Executive Director, "The multitude of engaged organizations and individual citizens who have worked very hard to begin the Washington County: One Community building process have demonstrated intensive, high quality collaboration, marked by optimism, productive teamwork, dedication and great mutual respect. Washington County: One Community provides a regional governance model for the state. And best of all, Washington County now has a foundation for enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness in delivering the quality of life its residents desire from the inside out."

Over a dozen Washington County representatives traveled to Hermon on Thursday to accept the award on behalf of *Washington County: One Community* and participate in a statewide program promoting rural broadband access. Lead spokesperson Barbara Drisko, Columbia Falls Selectperson, credited Maine Rural Partners with "giving us the self-confidence to trust in ourselves to determine our shared future." Also participating in the award ceremony were Linda Pagels-Wentworth, County Manager, Judy East of the Washington County Council of Governments, Janet Toth of Eastern Maine Development Corporation and the Dept. of Economic & Community Development, Gary Edwards of the Down East Resource Conservation & Development Area and Rick Tanney and Eleody Libby of HealthWays. Machias Savings Bank provided financial support for the event.

Senator Kevin Raye (R-Perry), a board member of MRP, initiated the idea of the group's partnership with Washington County that resulted in *Washington County: One Community*. Raye was unable to attend the award presentation due to legislative responsibilities, but praised the work being done. "This worthwhile effort is bringing people from around the county together.

By thinking of ourselves as one community, and working cohesively toward common goals, we will be able to accomplish more for the people of Washington County in a variety of areas," said Raye.

In accepting the award, County Manager and Washington County: One Community Chairperson Linda Pagels-Wentworth credited County Commission Chairman Chris Gardner with his leadership in making this project a priority six months prior to her coming into office as the first Washington County Manager.

Pagels-Wentworth stated, "We are honored to receive this prestigious award. *Washington County: One Community* has opened the doors to collaboration in Washington County and we are looking forward to building successful projects, expanding the role of county government and creating an organizational model which can be replicated across the state. We appreciate the many partners who made our success to date possible and Maine Rural Partners for their guidance and assistance."

Washington County: One Community Communications Team Chair Judy East shared some preliminary findings from the countywide public opinion survey conducted in September. Results are still being compiled for presentation to the next Washington County: One Community Board meeting on December 19th, after which they will be posted on the Washington County: One Community website at www.washingtoncountymaine.com. For further information about Washington County: One Community, contact co-director Eleody Libby at elibby@mail.rmcl.org or 733-4760.

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Attached photo suggested caption:

Washington County: One Community receives 2007 Partner of the Year Award from Maine Rural Partners.

Pictured from left to right:

Rick Tanney, Drug Free Communities Support Program Coordinator, Regional Medical Center of Lubec

Janet Toth, Eastern Maine Development Corporation and Dept. of Economic & Community Development Small Business Counselor

Mike Bush, Penquis Housing Developer and Maine Rural Partners Board Chair

Linda Pagels-Wentworth, County Manager and Washington County: One Community Chairperson

Mary Ann Hayes, Maine Rural Partners Executive Director

Barbara Drisko, Columbia Falls Selectboard and Washington County Drug Action Team Chairperson

Gary Edwards, Down East Resource Conservation & Development Area Coordinator

Eleody Libby, Washington County: One Community co-director

Judy East, Washington County Council of Governments Executive Director

Photo Credit (Not necessary): Emily Cannon, Public Affairs Officer, USDA-Rural Development