



## For immediate release

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### **16+ Portland downtown businesses unite for Guatemala Youth**

#### **Safe Passage launches first art tags campaign to collect donations**

**PORTLAND, ME, August 30, 2010** – 16+ Portland downtown businesses will join forces to help launch Maine-based Safe Passage’s first Maine Perspective Project. A tag of artwork sold by retailers will raise awareness and funds for impoverished Guatemala youth.

Safe Passage’s Maine Perspective Project runs the month of September. The campaign focuses on downtown merchants selling and displaying colorful art tags to customers for \$1 each. Downeast Energy’s generous underwriting of the project allows 100% of the money collected from sales to fund Safe Passage’s Art Program.

The Project aims to bring the harsh realities of poverty a little closer to our minds and to show how we all have the power to make a difference in the lives of others. “Visiting the dump in Guatemala City really does change one’s perspective. Nothing has moved me more than visiting with the children and their families who live there. Safe Passage and supporters are turning the dream of education into a reality for the community’s poorest,” says Maine’s former First Lady and Safe Passage volunteer, Mary Herman.

### **Safe Passage Guatemala Art Program**

Started in April 2009, the Art Program benefits over 500 individuals every year, from children to teenagers. The program encourages the expression and creativity for Guatemala youth through

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visual arts and music. Safe Passage volunteers teach classes in portraiture, art history, photography, printmaking, piano and guitar (<http://www.safepassage.org/artprogram>).

“Contributing to the community has been a long-time mission for Downeast Energy,” says Vice President, Betsy Morrell. “Safe Passage's Art Program allows these kids to imagine a better life for themselves while they receive the education they need to break the cycle.” To further encourage participation, Downeast is also giving away a tank of home heating oil to one of the art tag donors.

Helping out on the Maine Perspective Project campaign is Safe Passage intern Ben Berman, a senior from Cape Elizabeth High School and leader of one of many high school clubs involved in organizing group volunteer trips to Guatemala. People travel from all over the world to volunteer at Safe Passage and many of them are students from Maine. “I myself was part of a group visiting Safe Passage this summer. Now that I’m back in Maine, I’m excited to be bringing the Guatemala perspective to downtown Portland,” says Berman. Similarly, As Mary Herman reflects, “Safe Passage is changing the lives of Maine’s kids as they interact meaningfully with Safe Passage children, families, and staff.”

### **About Safe Passage**

The late Maine native and Bowdoin graduate Hanley Denning founded safe Passage in 1999. Denning’s goal was to provide a safe alternative for children and families recycling trash in the toxic environment around the Guatemala City garbage dump.

Today, Safe Passage provides education and integrated social support for over 500 of Guatemala’s poorest children and their 300+ families. Known in Latin America as Camino Seguro, a loose Spanish translation of “Safe Passage,” the organization has been internationally recognized as a model for providing life opportunities to impoverished communities. Safe Passage is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, dedicated to marshalling local and international ideas, collaboration, volunteerism and contributions in support of Denning’s vision. <http://www.safepassage.org>.

### **16+ Businesses Participating in Maine Perspective Project**

16+ Participants including: Arabica, Longfellow Books, Mexicali Blues, KnitWit Yarn Shop, YES Books, Head Games, Eli Phant, Port Bean, Maxwells Pottery, Spartan Grill, Videoport, Spun Arts & Apparel, Norway Savings Bank, Body Architect, Carla Bella, and Bayside Bowl.

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### **Note to editors/reporters:**

Safe Passage photos and video clips are available.

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