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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MARY MAGDALENE PROJECT

**NAMES 2009 COMMUNITY ADVOCATE
HONOREES**

LA City Attorney Sonja Dawson

and

***Outgoing LA Police Commission President Anthony
Pacheco***

Recognized for Community Leadership

Los Angeles / San Fernando Valley: **Sonja Dawson, Esq.**, Deputy City Attorney and creator of the LA City Attorney Office's "Prostitution Diversion Program," and **Anthony Pacheco, Esq.**, President of the Los Angeles Police Commission 2007-2009 and partner at Proskauer Rose LLP in Century City have been named this year's "Community Advocate" Honorees by The Mary Magdalene Project. The Mary Magdalene Project is LA's only nonprofit devoted exclusively to assisting women prostitutes and their families out of prostitution.

Dawson and Pacheco will be officially recognized at the annual black tie and live and silent auction event The Mary Magdalene Project will hold October 17th, 2009 in the Blossom Ballroom of The Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, the newly refurbished ballroom site of the original 1929 Oscar ceremonies. The event theme is "Legendary Hollywood," allowing the nearly 300 guests to dress as their favorite Hollywood star and emceed by Co-Anchor Leslie Sykes of KABC TV Los Angeles.

"We've selected Sonja and Anthony this year because of their exceptional personal commitments to the special and often overwhelming issues that face women trying to get out of prostitution, as well as the success of their efforts to positively affect our city bureaucracies' grasp of the problem and what can be done about it," says Dr. Martin McCombs, Executive Director of MMP. "They've used their leadership roles both to humanize these abused women and better empower the agencies that try to help them."



mary magdalene project

Three years ago Sonja Dawson took a look at the women cycling through the court system over and over again for prostitution arrests. Many were pimp-controlled, incredibly young with children, and with severe co-occurring disorders like substance abuse and homelessness. "I created the Prostitution Diversion Program because I saw the need to find alternative approaches other than traditional prosecutorial functions. Simply stated, we just could not arrest our way out of the problem." The PDP is a pilot program that has spawned interventions for both the women prostituting themselves and the men patronizing them. For first time offenders in the pilot program catchment area, the women are given an alternative that allows them to participate in multiple-intervention social service sessions, and if they complete it and don't re-offend in the following year, their original charges are dropped. For men patronizing prostitutes (known as "johns"), if it's their first arrest, they are offered an alternative to sentencing that requires them to attend an 8-hour "John School." In John School they learn more about the risks they are taking and listen to former women prostitutes talk about their lives.

Anthony Pacheco became an immediate advocate as soon as he learned of the existence of the MMP. He has been a participant at MMP events, and began to use his influence to introduce important members of the LAPD to the agency, and arranged for the Commission to receive a special orientation to the agency and its plans to expand services to include a drop in clinic. "This Project," according to Mr. Pacheco, "recognizes the value of the human condition, and acts with empathy and dignity in attempting to better the circumstances of prostitutes. The Project attempts, in a way that no other program has, to reintegrate prostitutes back into society with the use of a variety of coordinated, comprehensive services. It is a Project of which I am proud to be a part."

McCombs hopes the agency's stepping up to increase its community level impact by opening a community drop in clinic at a time like this will prompt more support and attention from donors of all kinds. "These women are a significantly misunderstood special needs population," says he. "They seem to inspire a lot of rage from communities who think they're out there because they like it instead of the fact they're risking everything just to survive."

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ADDITIONAL CONTACTS / RELATED STORIES:

JPEG Photographs are available of both honorees
Ms. Dawson and Mr. Pacheco are available for comments

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