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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***District Attorney to Start a
"Neighborhood Court"***

(Woodland, CA) – April 15, 2013 - District Attorney Jeff Reisig, in partnership with the Davis Police Department and the UC Davis Police Department announces Neighborhood Court, a new adult criminal offender diversion program based on restorative justice. This innovative program will be offered in the City of Davis and on the UC Davis campus starting in May of 2013.

Yolo County will become only the second county in California to offer such a program for adults arrested for criminal offenses. Currently, San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon has been coordinating a Neighborhood Court program in the City and County of San Francisco for two years.

Restorative justice is accomplished in Neighborhood Court by involving the victim, the offender and community members in a process focused on the harm to the victim caused by crime and the offender's obligation to repair that harm. This process empowers those most affected by the crime. Neighborhood Court outcomes, to the extent possible, repair the harm done to the victim, emphasize offender accountability and responsibility while addressing the reasons for the offense.

Neighborhood Court offers an alternative to criminal court. Rather than charging a case for prosecution, the District Attorney's Office will refer certain misdemeanors and infractions to Neighborhood Court. In Neighborhood Court, a panel of trained volunteers from the community hears the case. All hearings are confidential and participation by the offender is completely voluntary. In addition, any victim must also consent to the program for a case to be diverted into Neighborhood Court. If either the victim or the offender do not agree, the matter will be handled in the traditional criminal justice system.

In Neighborhood Court, cases will be efficiently resolved as participants will have their cases heard and fully completed before they would even appear in criminal court for their arraignment on charges. Resolutions are only reached after a restorative justice based conference between the parties.

Neighborhood Court has the potential to significantly save both time and money for criminal courts and the agencies that work in them. Recidivism can be reduced by keeping low-level offenders out of the criminal justice system and keeping convictions off their record. Through the community panel driven process, participants will gain a much greater understanding of the impacts their crimes have had on their victims and the community, making them less likely to reoffend.

Panel members will be made up of diverse members of the Davis and UC Davis communities. Panel members will receive formal training in restorative justice and problem solving. City of Davis panel members will include residents, business owners, parents, retired people, and students. UC Davis panel members will include students, faculty and staff and alumni. Panel members will NOT include prosecutors, defense attorneys or judges. In order to repair the harm caused by the crime and to resolve the case, panel members will work with the offenders to reach a mutual agreement which may include restitution, community service and counseling.

Yolo County District Attorney Jeff Reisig expressed promise about the Neighborhood Court program. “San Francisco has shown the impact and success that Neighbor Court had on their community,” said Reisig. “We visited San Francisco, spoke to District Attorney Gascon and his staff and watched hearings in the Bayview neighborhood. We were very impressed.” Reisig continued, “I believe that the restorative justice approach that we will utilize in our Neighborhood Court has the real potential to help our communities proactively engage in finding meaningful resolutions to some crimes, which will not only benefit the victims as a priority, but will also help the offenders learn and not repeat the behavior.”

San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon commented on the sharing of innovative programs between his office and Yolo County. “I am proud of our Neighborhood Court, and am pleased that District Attorney Reisig is bringing the model to Yolo County,” said Gascon. “I am a strong believer that we can learn from each other to improve the safety of our communities. I recently visited with DA Reisig to learn about innovations in the Yolo DA's Office, and am glad to be able to bring the success of San Francisco's Neighborhood Courts model to your community.”

For more information, contact the District Attorney at neighborhoodcourt@yolocounty.org or (530) 681-6323. Or, visit www.yoloda.org.

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