

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers and supporters of Project Understanding

Volume XVIII No. 4

April 2003



Hats Off to Our Volunteers

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

Our Mission Statement: Project Understanding is a faith-based agency founded and established on the principles and ideals of Judaism and Christianity whose mission is twofold: To do justice by serving the poor, hungry and oppressed with compassion and mercy, and to provide avenues for those who wish to serve others.

As written above, the Project Understanding

Mission Statement makes the opportunity to serve as important as serving those in need. Every day those coming in for assistance are met by volunteers who offer them a smile and who try to meet their needs with dignity

and respect.

April is National Volunteer Month and each year we make an effort to recognize and thank our hundreds of volunteers. The theme chosen this year is "Hats Off to Our Volunteers." The tasks done by these volunteers are many and varied. Volunteers provide a listening ear to people who come for help. They pro-

vide encouragement and support for children who are struggling in school. They provide food to people who have nothing to eat and to give their children to eat.

These volunteers come from many walks of life. They are high school students and retired persons. They are professional people and they are homemakers. Some provide several hours each week. Some provide just a few hours one time. Our hats go off to them all.

A listing of what our volunteers have done and continue to do can be found on page 5. As has been our custom in recent years in honor of National Volunteer Month, we have invited some of our volunteers to describe their experience at Project Understanding. ♦

Gerri Volunteers Because She Cares About People

By Geri Loe, Reception and SARAH Volunteer

I had to think for a moment about the question, "Why do I volunteer?" It's something I've always done. When I was a little girl, my parents were frequently active in volunteer organizations, and I sensed the passion and devotion they felt for these

activities. I felt that I had a responsibility as well, so I took the plunge into volunteerism, and have never regretted it.

Because I love teaching, I've always looked for opportunities where I can share my skills and knowledge with others. Naturally, my formal introduction to Project Understanding has been through the after school tutoring program. I became a volunteer tutor, and then "free-lanced" as a tutor trainer for the program. I loved it! I continue to enjoy the tutoring, but additionally I've expanded to working with adults in need of basic assistance at the SARAH Center and with the Reception and Referral Program that Project Understanding offers.

Unfortunately, with my heavy teaching schedule, I don't help out nearly as often as I'd like to. Be assured though, that I'll always find some time to volunteer, whether it's once a week or once a month. Why? Because I feel a need to be aware of what and who is beyond my own small, comfortable world. Why? Because I learn and experience something new each time I'm able to connect with someone in need.

See Geri, Page 2



Geri

Continued From Page 1

Why? Because I care about humanity. I believe in people and especially in our capacity to adapt, to cope, to do good, to be just, and to love.

Finally, when you ask me, I realize that volunteering is part of who I am and who I want to be. Yes, it fulfills me as a member of the human race. Thank you, Project Understanding, for being here to help! ♦

Volunteering Deepens Life

By Charlo Stuart
Pantry Volunteer

Working in the Project Understanding food pantry has been a blessing to me. Two years ago, I realized that I wanted to do some volunteer work. The generous and gracious Gloria Johnston of Trinity Lutheran Church recommended Project Understanding.

I never realized how spiritually fulfilling this activity would be. During this time, the appreciation from the people who have used the various services available to them through Project Understanding has touched my heart.

These people have briefly shared portions of their lives and their faith and their deep appreciation. These people have smiled, laughed, and yes, shed a tear or two. These people hold fast to the belief that there is a purpose to life and that there is hope in the future.

I was a teacher in Ventura Unified School District. After teaching, I worked as a profes-

sional interior designer. Now I look forward to every minute that I am able to spend at Project Understanding. If you are seeking a tangible way to express your love and concern for others, Project Understanding may be what you are looking for. The people I have met, staff, volunteers, and recipients, have deepened my life. I have gained much more than I will ever be able to give in return.

Project Understanding needs your prayers and can put your donations of food and money and time to good use. ♦

English Class for Spanish Speakers

By Brenda Loree
ESL Volunteer Teacher

A new English as a Second Language class is underway at Project Understanding's Tutoring Center at the corner of Vince and Ventura Avenue in Ventura.

The free class, which began in January, is for beginner-level adults. It meets on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon and will continue through June.

Currently 11 women, mostly mothers with children in the Ventura Avenue area schools, are learning basic English communication skills.

The class is taught by volunteer Brenda Loree, who has previously taught ESL classes to mothers in Oxnard's Head Start program.

Donations of ESL workbooks and texts are welcome. Call Marcia Wakelee, program coordinator at Project Understanding. ♦

Larry Helps the Light to Go On

An Interview With Larry Smith,
Tutoring Volunteer

When Larry Smith retired from his civilian position at Point Magu in January 1997, he was looking for something meaningful to do with his newfound leisure time. After his years as an electronic engineer, he wasn't ready for a rocking chair.

He got together for lunch with Tom Hashbarger, the retired executive director of Easter Seals. Larry knows Tom well after serving for 20 years on the Easter Seals board of directors.

Tom told Larry about his involvement with the Project Understanding Tutoring Program and it sounded interesting to Larry.

So, in March of 1997, Larry began tutoring through the Saticoy Tutoring Center. He has been tutoring ever since. He tutors one or two students each year. He says that the greatest reward is when a student grasps something that will expand his or her horizons. "A light goes on," in Larry's words.

These are the experiences which keep Larry going through the disappointments. And there are disappointments. Some of the students with whom he has worked are there because someone told them to be there. It is hard to motivate a student when there is no support from home. But the rewards outweigh the disappointments and each year



See Larry, Page 3

Larry

Continued From Page 2

Larry returns to tutor.

Nor is tutoring Larry's only volunteer outlet. For the last three years, Larry has been a judge for the 7th and 8th grade entries at the annual Science Fair. He also volunteers with the Ventura Police Department two or three afternoons entering child abuse data into the computer. He says that the stories he deals with are heartbreaking.

And so, week in and week out, Larry returns to Saticoy to work with his tutoring students, hoping he can help the light go on. Thank you, Larry. ♦

Buena Students Volunteer

Tutors come in all ages and stages of life, but one very important source of tutors has been high school students.

In the box on this page is a list of nearly 40 Buena High School students who are currently tutoring through the Project Understanding Tutoring Program at three different sites.

Many of these students came through the efforts and from the classes of Diane Dowler. Diane, who has served nearly a decade as a member of the Project Understanding board of directors, is a social science teacher at Buena. She has, for many years, invited speakers from Project Understanding to address her classes. Diane encourages her students to become involved as volunteers and many choose to become tutors. Thank you, Diane and Buena students! ♦

Hats

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what these men did with their hats depended on with whom they were talking. If he was talking to a male friend he would usually leave his hat on. If he was talking to a woman he would always take his hat off.

But if he was talking to a man to whom he owed respect, for example, an older man, or his boss, he would always remove his hat. Hence the expression, "My hat's off to you."

So the theme for this year's National Volunteer Month is an appropriate one. "Hats Off to Volunteers."

We have great respect for our volunteers. They give so much and expect so little in return. They show such caring

and love to those whom we serve.

But respect is not the only reason we doff our hats to our volunteers.

We have all seen the images: A team wins the World Series and the players run onto the field and many throw their caps into the air. A high school or college graduation ends and the graduates throw their mortarboards into the air. These are acts of joy and pride over great accomplishment.

We too throw our hats in the air out of joy and pride for our world champion volunteers.

Our volunteers are the best. They are clearly deserving of all of our respect, joy and pride.

Project Understanding volunteers, our hats are off to you. ♦

Buena High School Students Who Are Project Understanding Tutors

Saticoy Site

Devon Anderson*
Stefanie Brawner
Tiffany Cadiz
Rachel Cowan
Alex Garfio
Kyle Hermanson
Ethan Klein
Jacqueline Maciel
Caitlin O'Neill
Emily Schrodek
John Wessel*

Kristen Bidwell*
Caitlin Burkhart
Kristin Coleman
Diana Essex*
Erin Haggerty
Claire Hopkins
Jessica Lee
Becca Malin
Chelsea Pearson
Lauren Sittel

Ryan Bolland
Desiree Cadiz*
Lauren Collart
Emma Galin-Attleson
Gabriela Halpern*
Cheryl Johnson
Karina Lyons
Yvette Medina
Crystal Razo
Sandra Tolmie

Eastminster Site

Emily Bradvica
Malysa Robson
Daniel Wild

Audra Favaro
Tim Sowell

Janice Killion
Katie Swilley

Avenue Site

Aimee Vaughan

* Tutored last year also

Board of Directors



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Morning Receptionist
Linda Simson
Reception Center Coordinator
Marcia Wakelee
Tutoring Coordinator

*“What does the LORD require
of you but to do justice, and to
love kindness, and to walk
humbly with your God?”*

Micah 6:8

Our Mission and Programs

Mission

Project Understanding is a faith-based agency founded and established on the principles and ideals of Judaism and Christianity whose mission is twofold: To do justice by serving the poor, hungry and oppressed with compassion and mercy, and to provide avenues for those who wish to serve others.

Programs

Project Understanding initiates, develops, and maintains special projects pulling together the efforts of individual local churches and groups to meet the needs of the less fortunate. The programs are:

Reception Center

A program that utilizes an intake process with skilled, supportive listeners to minister to and assess the needs of individuals and families in order to make appropriate referrals.

Focus on Food Emergency Food Pantry

A pantry program designed to help homeless and hungry people through times of crisis. The Pantry provides recipients with a three-day supply of food.

SARAH (Simply Arranging Real Assistance Here)

A source of basic services for homeless people. Services include shower and laundry facilities, a mail and message center for job seekers, and assistance in attaining food and shelter.

Ventura County Hunger Coalition

A network of church and community-based groups and individuals committed to eliminating domestic and world hunger through communications, advocacy, networking, education, and action.

Tutoring Station

To assist economically disadvantaged children, this program provides one hour per week of extra classroom instruction with volunteer tutors in one-to-one interaction at five locations in Ventura and Oxnard.

Religious Coalition for the Homeless

Churches and synagogues joining in faith-based action to provide transitional shelter and a voice for the homeless of Ventura County.

Emergency Shelter

Project Understanding is working with a coalition of interested agencies and individuals to provide year-round emergency shelter for homeless people.

How Our Able Volunteers Serve

Volunteers at Project Understanding help out in all of our programs. Here's how:

Tutoring

Volunteers provide one hour each week of one-on-one tutoring and self-esteem building to over 200 elementary students.

Reception Center

Volunteers provide a "listening ear" as case assistants for 20 or more families and individuals who daily walk through our doors seeking assistance.

SARAH

Volunteers and donors provide toiletries, towels, and laundry soap so an average of 25 individuals may shower daily or wash a load of laundry.

Religious Coalition for the Homeless

Volunteers and donors are providing transitional housing for homeless families through transitional apartments.

Emergency Shelter

Volunteers are working with a coalition of interested agencies and individuals to provide year-round emergency shelter for homeless people.

Ventura County Hunger Coalition

Volunteers organize and participate in seven CROP Walks in Ventura County communities to raise money for local, national and international food programs.

Focus on Food

Volunteers collect, bag and distribute a three-day supply of canned goods, produce and dry goods to an average of 75 families and individuals each week and provide USDA commodities for 160 families.

More Volunteers

Volunteers also:

- Donate many hours each month as board members;
- Prepare the newsletter for mailing; and
- Take on the challenge of maintaining the 50-year-old buildings that house Project Understanding, the Avenue Tutoring Center and the Transitional Apartments.

Each program has immediate volunteer opportunities.

- Case assistance in the Reception Center.
- Transport/distribute food at the Saticoy pantry.
- Tutor an elementary student.
- Host/hostess in the SARAH Center.

Call Kendra at 652-1326 for a tour and to sign-up. ♦

“Project Shelter” Reminder

By Lisa Cerino, Coordinator for Project Shelter

Project Shelter is an educational camping event in which groups will raise money to help homeless people and others in need in Western Ventura County and to raise awareness about the problems of homelessness. Individuals and group members will raise money, camp, and learn about

homelessness, then raise awareness by teaching others what they learned. Project Shelter will be held at Emma Wood State Beach on May 2 - 4.

Participants will raise money in the weeks before the event by circulating sponsor sheets among friends and work or school mates, for example.

If you are interested in participating in Project Shelter, please contact Lisa Cerino at (805)901-4239. God bless you in your desire to help others. ♦

Jennifer Richards Joins P.U. Staff as A.M. Receptionist

Jennifer Spoentgen Richards has been a lifelong resident of Ventura. She grew up in the Methodist church and her father was at one time on the personnel selection committee for Project Understanding, and her mother is a former board member. Jennifer grew up familiar with Project Understanding and is thrilled to be working for us!

She attended UC Santa Barbara and received a degree in religious studies and anthropology. She was able to study abroad her senior year in India for six months. It was there, that she developed a real heart for mission work.

She is married with one daughter, who attends Ventura Missionary School. She is currently finishing up her master's degree in special education at Azusa Pacific University. She is currently a member of First Baptist Church, where she teaches Sunday school. ♦



Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed cash during the month of February:
Individuals

Susan Adamich
Judy Alexandre
Babette Amirkhan
Arthur & Dennis Anderson
William & Dorothy Asano
Roy & Mary Lou Ash
Marion Baranowski
Marie Beckman
Elizabeth Blanchard
Donna Boeck
Barbara Born
Jeffrey Brackett & Miriam Arichea
Bob & Mary Braitman
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Richard & Mary Willhardt
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In honor of:
Bill & Marcia Wakelee
Given by:
Joyce Kennedy

In honor of:
Chuck & Doris Smith's
Anniversary
Given by:
Ernest & Laura Gulovsen

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

In honor of:

Birthdays of George &
Wreatha Loffswold and their
71st Wedding Anniversary

Given by:

Leona Lewis

In memory of:

Gary Hodgson, Jr.

Given by:

Barbara Del Prete &
Timothy Worrell

In memory of:

Maria Cavallo

Given by:

Raymond & Marion Monroe

In honor of:

Norma Jean Schneider's
80th Birthday

Given by:

Ernest & Laura Gulovsen

In memory of:

Rae Adelman

Given by:

Kathi Taylor

In memory of:

Robert J. Bolson, Jr.

Given by:

Virginia Bolson

In memory of:

Wanda Pinkerton

Given by:

Samuel & Barbara Marsh

Churches/Organizations

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College United Methodist
Church
Community Presbyterian
Church
County of Ventura
First Assembly of God of
Ventura
First Baptist Church of Ojai
First Baptist Church of Ventura

Kinko's

No Room at the Inn
Ojai Presbyterian Church

Pythian Sisters

St. Paul's Episcopal Church of
Ventura

Temple Beth Torah

Trinity Lutheran Church,
Middle School Youth Group

United Methodist Church of
Westlake Village

United Methodist Church
California-Pacific Annual
Conference

United Way

**Thank you to the following
people and groups who
contributed food and other
items to our program in
February:**

Individuals

Denise Abdun-Nur
Robert Anderson
George Blok
Duane Chan
Adrian Enriquez
Albert & Janet Karian
John Lomagno
Margot Martin
Kathy Mesa
Kent & Farion Pearce
Carol Ann Rose
Harold W. Ruddick
Isabel Shepard
Loretta Tuttle
Les & Judy Vielbig
Leonard & Marsha Weber

Churches/Organizations

Anacapa Bread Company
Aztec Roofing
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Boy Scout Troops of Ventura
Church for the Nations
Church of the Foothills
College United Methodist
Church
Community Presbyterian
Church

Community of Christ Church
Eastminster Presbyterian
Church

First Christian Church

First United Methodist Church
of Ventura

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of Ventura, Hope Fellowship

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Trader Joe's

Trinity Lutheran Church

Trinity Presbyterian Church of
Camarillo

Unitarian Universalist Church

Ventura County Homeless
Coalition

Ventura Missionary Church

Vons Grocery, Harbor Blvd.

Vons Grocery, Telegraph Rd.

Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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Rheto-Rick

We Doff Our Hats to Our Volunteers

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

I stopped in to see a colleague unannounced the other day. When he came out to greet me he said he knew who was there before he saw me. He said, “My assistant told me the ‘Man with the hat is here.’”

As I think I have mentioned in this column before, I like hats and I routinely wear one—a felt fedora in the fall and winter and a palm (Panama) hat in the spring and summer.

When I started wearing a hat I realized that I did not

know the proper etiquette of hat wearing. Oh, I knew that I was supposed to take it off when I go indoors and put it on when I go outdoors, but that was about it.

I went to the bookstore looking for books on etiquette, but they all said, “Nobody wears hats anymore so we will not waste the space on hat etiquette.”

That’s when I had the idea of paying attention during old movies. Ellen and I like movies from the thirties and forties anyway. I just decided that I would pay attention to what the men in the movies did with their hats.

I have learned a lot that way.

One of the things I noticed almost immediately was that

See Hats, Page 5

Highlights

P. 1: Hats off to volunteers.

Gerie Loe volunteers because she cares for people.

P. 2: Volunteering deepens life for Charlo Stuart.

Brenda Loree offers English classes.

Larry Smith helps the light go on for students.

P. 3: Buena students are eager volunteers.

P. 5: How volunteers serve.

Jennifer Richards joins staff.



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- Save the date!
- **The First Project Understanding Rummage Sale**
- **Saturday, May 17**
- Time and place to be announced.
- If you have rummage to donate, please call Aina Barber 642-9171.

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