

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers and supporters of Project Understanding



Volume XXV No. 4
(Monthly)

April 2010

In celebration of Rick Pearson's service to Project Understanding

By Honorable Melinda A. Johnson, Retired
Immediate Past President of the Project Understanding Board

On April 22 friends, co-workers, and Project Understanding clients and supporters will gather at Ventura's Wedgewood Center to thank and honor Rick Pearson



for his many years of service, and twenty years as executive director of this agency.

This newsletter contains your invitation to attend. We encourage you to spread the word so that everyone who has experienced Rick's

loving and effective guidance can join in fellowship to recognize his accomplishments.

Rick graduated from UCLA with a degree in engineering, but quickly found his way into ministering to others. He attended the Claremont School

of Theology to receive both his master of divinity and master of arts in religious education degrees. After three years serving a congregation in Wisconsin, Rick returned to California where he was a diaconal minister of Christian education at First United Methodist Church in Ventura, director of Habitat for Humanity, director of education at Santa Paula First United Methodist Church, finally coming to Project Understanding and becoming its director in 1990.

The most recent, and tangible, evidence of Rick's hard work for Project Understanding is last year's opening of SHORE, a supportive housing project which provides a home to fifteen formerly homeless families. It took more than a decade of persuasion and persistence, of creativity and commitment to bring this to fruition. Finding the money, overcoming stereotyped objections, meeting the requirements of local, state and federal agencies — this was a daunting task. Many faithful

Please join us for a Retirement Celebration you won't want to miss!

Rick Pearson is retiring after twenty years of service as executive director of Project Understanding.

Join us for fun, food, and friends. Pictures, stories and donations.

Thursday, April 22
4:30 to 7:00 p.m.
(Presentation at 5:15 p.m.)

Wedgewood Center
5800 Olivas Park Dr. (near Victoria)
Ventura
\$15 per person

(To order tickets or make a donation in Rick's honor, please use the form on page 3.)

volunteers saw this through, and, at their head was Rick Pearson, the constant.

SHORE is but one lasting monument to Rick's efforts. He found grant money to renovate the Vince Corner Family Lodge, once a tutoring center, and now our expanded pantry, and got city approval to open it at a time when such permits were nearly impossible to obtain. He increased our tutoring sites from two to six.

He procured the donation of our Transition House in Oxnard, which, for thirteen years has housed families transitioning from homelessness to self-sufficiency. The success stories

See Rick Pearson P. 2

Living our vision of the future

By Judy Alexandre
President, Board of Directors

As Project Understanding makes the transition from Rick Pearson to a new executive director there will be many changes and many things that will remain constant. We will continue to be a faith-based agency seeking to serve the poor, needy, and oppressed in our community with love and dignity, and we will continue to provide opportunities for others to serve.

Vision Statement Project Understanding

Project Understanding is well-known throughout our region as an agent of Shalom: peace with God, peace within us and within the families we serve and peace in our community. We engage and inspire people of faith to act on their values and address important social justice issues. With mercy, we assist people to achieve their maximum level of independence. Our faith-based and person-centered approach develops and directs resources to fulfill the promise of 'helping people transform their lives.'

In preparation for "building" this new reality, I was drawn to re-examine the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was in exile serving as cupbearer to the King. Nehemiah's vision was to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed. For this he needed the King's favor. Nehemiah wept, mourned and prayed. He sought and recognized God's hand and voice.

This is what the board of directors has been doing for the past several months and will

continue to do. We seek His direction and His voice.

When Nehemiah knew the time was right, he acted. His vision was clear and he knew that the God of Heaven would give him success.

Despite lies, manipulations, temptations and many other obstacles, Nehemiah kept his focus. He was not swayed. So we also know that there will be many directions in which Project Understanding can turn and many obstacles in the path moving forward. But we know that the God of Heaven is with us as we seek that clear direction. The multiple obstacles will not keep us from our mission and vision.

When the wall was rebuilt the people celebrated. They recommitted themselves to God's purpose and renewed the covenant with God.

There is work ahead for us, and our vision and resolve must match that of Nehemiah. Then we too will rejoice in the freshness of the new beginning. We will commit ourselves to His purposes and seek to bring His Shalom to the community.

To the left is our new Statement of Vision. Please join us as we live it into reality. ♦

Rick Pearson Continued From P. 1

from graduates of Transition House are touching beyond words.

He has made Project Understanding a good neighbor, working with other area residents to assure that services rendered through SARAH and the Reception Center cause minimal disruption to their lives. He has turned fear, born of misunder-

standing into support for the goals of Project Understanding. Rick is, above all, an educator. He has made our community understand the deep needs of their less fortunate neighbors and persuaded them to help, through their donations and their service.

On a personal note, I sat in the dependency court for many years while on the bench. My first job was to protect children from inadequate, sometimes abusive parents. My second job was to try to reunify those children with their parents, through the efforts of the social workers. I had a lengthy list of agencies who offered services aimed toward that goal. Without question, Project Understanding provided the most practical and valuable assistance — accepting mail which gave the parents notice of court hearings, providing bus tokens for them to get to court, providing food for families who otherwise could not have stayed together. This is the kind of agency Rick Pearson ran. Doing God's work. Bearing witness to his charity, through action. It is no surprise that Rick's heroes are those who have spoken out for social justice, such as Desmond Tutu and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

I'm proud to have been Rick's friend for more than twenty-five years. I'm hugely impressed by what he has done for his community, and the example he has set for the rest of us.

Please RSVP early and join us to toast Rick's accomplishments and affirm our support as he moves into the next stage of his life of service. Perhaps now he'll have a little more time to read all the books on his list and work all those crossword puzzles he loves so much. ♦

SARAH Center needs supplies

The SARAH Center helps meet the basic survival needs of homeless people. At SARAH they may shower, do laundry, use a telephone and receive mail. There is always a need for supplies and personal items.

What follows is a list of items that are currently needed in SARAH, and they are listed in the order of greatest need.

- Paper products
 - 6-inch plates
 - 6-inch bowls
 - 9-inch plates
- Napkins
- Deodorant
- Socks
- Razors
- Shaving cream
- 10-oz. hot cups/styrofoam

These items may be dropped off at Project Understanding on weekday mornings between 8 a.m. and 12 noon or you may call 652-1326 to arrange for someone to pick them up. ♦

Carrying

Continued from P. 8

would get credit for only a single.

Central Washington player Mallory Holtman also understood the situation. She went to the umpires and said, “Excuse me, would it be okay if we carried her around and she touched each bag?” Though surprised, the umpires said it would be okay.

So Mallory and teammate Liz Wallace picked up Sara, carried her around the bases, gingerly letting her left foot touch each base, and therefore, letting her receive credit for her home run.

In the end, Mallory and Liz’s Central Washington lost the game but neither regretted helping Sara and Western Oregon beat them. Nor were their teammates angry at the selfless act. They clearly believed helping an injured opponent was more important than winning the game.

Many of the people who come into Project Understanding are much more deeply injured than a damaged knee.

But every day our selfless volunteers help carry them through difficult times and situations.

So kudos to Mallory and Liz. And kudos to the Project Understanding volunteers, all of whom would do whatever it takes to help anyone — even an opponent — reach their goals.

Update on my website

Last month I wrote about the website that I am going to be writing after my “retirement.” If any of you have been there in the past month, you have probably been disappointed by its unfinished appearance and its slow development. It seems that winding down a twenty-year career is more time consuming than I had anticipated, and I have had some extra responsibilities during Lent at my own church.

So please bear with me. If you visit the site now, there is at least a subscription button where you can sign up to be notified by email when a new article is posted.

Thank you for your support in the past, and I hope you will give my new website a try at: www.RhetoRick.com ♦

Please use this form to order tickets to Rick Pearson’s Farewell Celebration on April 22 or to make a donation in Rick’s honor.

Rick Pearson Celebration

Yes, I want to be a part of the Celebration for Rick Pearson.

- Enclosed is \$ _____ for _____ tickets (\$15/person).
- Sorry, I can’t be there, but here is my gift of \$ _____ in Rick’s honor.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

(Please make checks payable to Project Understanding.)



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*“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 individuals, local congregations 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.

Tutoring Program

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

SHORE (Supportive Housing Opportunities in a Residential Environment)

Project Understanding provides 15 units of permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless people in the WAV Project in downtown Ventura.

The Bread of Life

Five congregations are working together to prepare and serve meals to hungry people in Oxnard each week.

Overcoming Poverty — One Life at a Time

■ Dr. George Barna to speak in Ventura on June 4th.

Dr. Barna is a researcher and the author of forty-four books, included several bestsellers about faith and culture. He has been a professor,



Dr. George Barna

a pastor, and vice chairman of Compassion International, which addresses poverty through child development in twenty-four nations, and he is in demand as a public speaker across the nation.

In his presentation, George Barna will address:

- The identity of poverty
- Causes of poverty
- The spiritual nuances of helping the poor
- Local and personal solutions

The event will be held at the Ventura County Christian School on MacMillan Avenue in Ventura from 7 to 9 p.m. on Friday, June 4, 2010. It will be a fund-raiser for Project Understanding.

Information on how to participate will be available in next month's newsletter, but for now, save the date. ♦

Volunteers at Project Understanding are people in action

As we, once again, approach National Volunteer Week, we are reminded that the services of Project Understanding would not be possible without the efforts of hundreds of volunteers who give thousands of hours of their time each year.

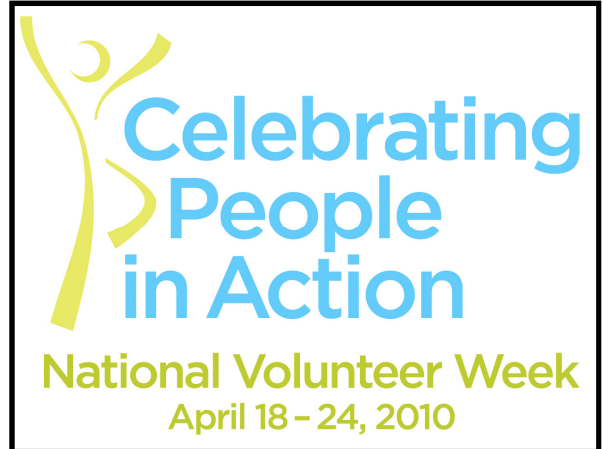
Volunteers tutor through the Tutoring Program, greet and interview people in the Reception Center, distribute food through the Pantry, interact with the homeless people who come to the SARAH Center as well as many other tasks at Project Understanding

Space does not allow for us to recognize publically each of these deserving people, but the following article celebrates the actions of one person who faithfully volunteers in the Reception Center. ♦

Meet Reception Center volunteer Laura Moline

By Sandra Morales
Resource Manager

Laura came to us over two years ago and began to serve as an intake volunteer in our Reception Center. Having just had her hours cut back at work, she had a lot of free time on her hands. Laura recognized the many blessings in her life and wanted to find a way and a place to share and give back the things she had been given. Her inspiration was John 21:16 where Jesus instructs Simon to



“Take care of my sheep.” She also understands that God made us to live in community and wanted to be with others who were also serving.

Leaning towards the quiet side, Laura describes her first time volunteering in our Reception Center as intimidating. Her experience was one of growth and compassion. “By the time I walked out the door, my heart was broken for these people and I pray for all of them. It feels good to be obedient and help.”

The other staff members and volunteers say that she always comes in with a smile on her face and she is always offering to help wherever it is needed. She works hard and is good at what she does.

Laura is married with five adult children and lives in Ventura and is soon to become a grandmother. She is an avid reader, loves walking her dog and appreciates the quiet and peaceful moments she currently enjoys with her husband.

We appreciate Laura and are thankful for the gifts and talents that she has shared with us. We look forward to a long relationship with her. ♦



Laura Moline



Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed cash to our program in February:

Individuals

Judy Alexandre
Helen Archer
William & Dorothy Asano
Mary Lou Ash
Lila Atkisson
Beverly Attema
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**Thank you to the following
people and groups who con-
tributed food and other items
to our program in February:**

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Traci Elliot
Phyllis Sandoval
Cindy Saucedo

Churches & Organizations

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Church

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(Mariposa Fellowship)
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Pizza Hut
Temple Beth Torah
Trader Joe's
Trinity Lutheran
Ventura Missionary Church
Vons, Thompson Blvd.

Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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Sustaining donors are those who make a single gift of \$1,000 or more. To show our appreciation for their support, they are listed here for twelve months.

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Rheto-Rick

Volunteers carry them through

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

On Thompson Boulevard in Ventura, right where it makes a bend at Laurel Street, there is a billboard atop a building that is right in front of drivers as they make the turn traveling west.

In recent months that billboard showed a message from an organization called *Values.com The Foundation for a Better Life*.

The picture to the left is what was on the billboard. The large



caption read, "Helped injured opponent win." But I didn't need the caption. I already knew the story.

It was a softball game between Western Oregon and Central Washington. Central Washington needed to win the game to keep alive its hopes of earning a bid to the NCAA Division II playoffs. Western Oregon senior Sara Tucholsky hit a home run with two runners on — the first homerun of Sara's college career. As she rounded first base, Sara's right knee gave out and she fell to the ground in agony. She was clearly unable to get up, let alone make it around the bases. If anyone from Western Oregon touched or helped her, she would be out. If they substituted another runner for her, she

See Carrying on P. 3

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of:



To Contact Us

On the Web
www.projectunderstanding.org

By Phone
805-652-1326 (Voice)
805-652-1389 (Fax)



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Project Understanding at San Buenaventura
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