

# PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers  
and supporters of Project  
Understanding

Volume XVIII No. 12  
(Monthly)

December 2003



## Thankful for All In-Kind Donations

It takes generous gifts of many types to keep the services of Project Understanding operating. It, of course, takes gifts of money—more than half of the funds to support our efforts come from our generous donors.

It takes gifts of time. Hun-

dreds of volunteers give thousands of hours each year.

But it also takes what are usually referred to as “in-kind” donations. These are donations of goods or specialized services often given by businesses or professionals but which can be given by anyone.

They are called “in-kind” because they are given in the usual type or kind of product or

service in which the donor deals.

Project Understanding receives many types of in-kind donations. Among the most common are food for the pantry, books for the tutoring program and used computers for many uses. But the variety is almost endless.

In this issue of the Project Understanding News, we highlight and offer our appreciation to all the individuals, businesses, organizations and congregations who make generous in-kind donations throughout the year. Your support is not only “in-kind,” it is very kind. ♦

## The Dan Stevens Shalom Award



Project Understanding will honor  
**Dr. Robert Dodge**  
A Ventura family physician  
With the Dan Stevens Shalom Award

**Sunday, December 7, 3 p.m.**

During a meeting of  
Citizens for Peaceful Resolutions  
At First United Methodist Church Ventura

Also at the December 7 meeting  
Hear the Citizens for Peaceful Resolutions present  
**“The Season of Peace and Peacemaking”**

With Featured Speakers

**Mother Cory Lassen**  
Rector of Saint Andrews Episcopal Church, Ojai

**Michelle Kimball**  
Sufi Leader in Santa Barbara

**Rabbi Lisa Hochberg-Miller**  
Temple Beth Torah, Ventura

First United Methodist Church  
1338 East Santa Clara Street, Ventura  
805-643-8621

## High Holy Days Emphasize a Time to Reach Out

By Rabbi Lisa Hochberg-Miller  
Temple Beth Torah

In the Jewish tradition, the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a time to reflect on one’s actions of the last year, and repent. Our goal is self-improvement.

And since Judaism teaches that we improve ourselves through our relationship with God and our relationships with

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## To Reach Out

Continued From Page 1

others, it is a natural extension of the High Holy Day season that we focus on giving the best of ourselves to others.

### **At the Jewish New Year the congregation donates food and clothes for others.**

The social action committee of Temple Beth Torah greets the Jewish New Year by asking congregants to donate food that can be distributed to Project Understanding, and clothing that can be distributed to local organizations. It is with a sense of pride that we support Project Understanding's work in this way!

About a month before the High Holy Days, during the Hebrew month of Elul, which is when we are supposed to begin this inner process of reflecting and atoning, the social action committee acquires new brown grocery bags from a local grocery chain. We then staple a letter to the front, telling congregants what type of donations would be most beneficial to Project Understanding's clients. We distribute the bags throughout the month, and then pass them out in earnest on Rosh Hashanah day. We include an appeal during the service for congregants to fill their bags during the ten-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and bring them back to us on Yom Kippur.

To that end, we rent a big storage box and place it in our parking lot, located so that as people pull into Temple they can hand their filled bags to social action committee volunteers who are waiting.

### **Congregation remembers its many blessings as it fasts on Yom Kippur.**

That we conclude our food drive on Yom Kippur is significant, for Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. A national Jewish hunger organization, Mazon (sustenance, in Hebrew), asks us as well to donate the amount of money that we would have spent feeding ourselves on that day to assist the hungry.

Our own fasting, while cleansing our souls, and bringing us to a sense of intimacy and urgency with God, vividly reminds us of how blessed we are each day to eat to our own content. To carry bags of food—and know that the food is off-limits to us—increases our sense of humility, when we realize that there is food abundant in our world but it is denied for millions who need it.

And then we walk into Yom Kippur morning services, and we hear the words of Isaiah which are chanted: Is this the fast that I have chosen? A day of self-affliction? . . . Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to unlock the shackles of injustice, to loosen the ropes of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free? . . . Surely it is to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, cover them, never withdrawing yourself. . . .

Through our High Holy Day Food and Clothing Drive, we at Temple Beth Torah remind ourselves of what all good people of faith know: how good it feels to reach out to those in need, for God is surely found in the space between the giving hand and the receiving one. ♦

## Thanks to Many Generous Local Businesses

By Carol Dawes  
Volunteer Property Manager

About a year and a half ago Rick Pearson asked me to act as a volunteer property manager for Project Understanding and Transition House.

Little did I know how rewarding it would be. In that period of time we have had major work done on Transition House plus fix-it type work on the main site. Every company or individual that I have contacted has given us a price break when I told them about Project Understanding's mission. These "breaks" have varied from giving the item to us or fixing it for free to knocking several thousand dollars off on the bid to everything in between. .

The following businesses are to be included:

Aztec Roofing  
Brad Burge Painting  
C. L. Construction  
(Chuck Lockwood's handyman services)  
Clearly Glass and Mirrors  
Fence Factory  
International Environmental Corporation  
(lead-based paint removal)  
Mark's Carpet  
Martin Cervantes Masonry and Concrete  
Jerry Rous Plumbing  
Ventura Pest Control  
Williams Refrigeration  
Yubeta Plumbing

Many thanks to these wonderful companies that help us here at Project Understanding. ♦

## In Memoriam— Bobbye Condron

By Kari Brogdin  
Business Manager

On November, 1, 2003, Bobbye Condron went to be with her Lord. Bobbye was the clerical support staff person at Project Understanding. Her title, however, says very little about what she was to this organization.



Bobbye believed deeply in the mission of Project Understanding. She was a donor, volunteer, and staff member here. It is rare to find someone who wants to be all three.

Bobbye went on a medical leave in March 2002 to have knee surgery. When she was to return, she became ill and learned that she had cancer. She fought a very courageous battle with her disease. When we would check on her health status, she would tell us about her latest round of chemotherapy or hospitalization, and then she would talk about how she wasn't sure how long it would be before she came back.

Bobbye was an active member at College United Methodist Church. She regularly took bulk food from our Food Pantry to her women's fellowship. This group would package beans, rice or oatmeal in family-size bags for distribution at Project Understanding. This woman (in her 70s) would load her minivan up with 500 pounds of rice and bring it back packaged the next day!

Bobbye led a full life. She

and her late husband, Stuart, raised five children. She worked as a certified senior escrow officer for 25 years before she retired. Project Understanding is what Bobbye did in her retirement. Bobbye touched all of us here in her special way. While we mourn her loss, we are also grateful for her life. ♦

## “No Room at the Inn” Nativity Display Scheduled for December 5-7

Once again this year, residents of Ventura County have an opportunity to view hundreds of nativities from private collections in one place. The proceeds from the display will again benefit shelter programs in Ventura County. Project Understanding has been one of the recipients of these funds for a number of years.



One of the nativities to be seen at “No Room at the Inn.”

The annual “No Room at the Inn” display of nativities is scheduled for December 5, 6, and 7. The display will be held at Camarillo United Methodist Church, 291 Anacapa Drive, Camarillo.

On Friday, December 5, the display will open with a Grand Opening Gala from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. The suggested donation for

the gala is \$20.00 per person in advance (\$25.00 at the door).

The display continues on Saturday, December 6, from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and on Sunday, December 8, also from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For the Saturday and Sunday displays the suggested donation for adults is \$3.00 and \$1.00 for children.

For more information or to make gala reservations you may call Nora (805-807-1088) or Judy (805- 469-5717).

Or visit the No Room at the Inn website at [www.noroom.org](http://www.noroom.org) where you can learn the history of the displays, get directions to Camarillo United Methodist Church and see photos of nativities from previous years. ♦

## Kindness

### Continued From Page 8

pay than she can live on—when, for example, she goes hungry so that you can eat more cheaply and conveniently—then she has made a great sacrifice for you, she has made you a gift of some part of her abilities, her health, and her life. The ‘working poor,’ as they are approvingly termed, are in fact the major philanthropists of our society. They neglect their own children so that the children of others will be cared for; they live in substandard housing so that other homes will be shiny and perfect . . . To be a member of the working poor is to be an anonymous donor, a nameless benefactor, to everyone else.”

To all people, rich and poor, who offer daily random acts of kindness, I offer my deep and sincere appreciation. ♦

## Board of Directors



**Judy Alexandre**, President

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Reception Center Coordinator

**Marcia Wakelee**

Tutoring Coordinator

**Shelley Wilmeth**

Clerical Support

*“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

**P**roject 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.

## Thank You to Those Who Supported Recent Fund Raising Efforts

Each of two recent fund raising efforts brought in about \$10,000 to support the work of Project Understanding.

### Live and Silent Auction.

The Home Improvement Live and Silent Auction was held on October 11. The event netted more than \$9,000.

Special thanks go out to the event's sponsors, Affinity Bank, Judy Alexandre, Anchor Printing and Graphics, the Public Defenders Office of Ventura County, Silver Construction, Realty Executives Coastal Cities, and Gordon-Fiano, Inc.

The evening was planned and carried out by the members of the Auction Committee whose members were Judy Alexandre, Karen Campbell, Mindy Johnson, Jackie Manley, and Sherry Baulch.

The funds raised from the auction will be used for the general budget of Project Understanding.

### The Nonevent Fund Raiser.

The other recent event was the Nonevent Event fund raiser. This nonevent raised more than \$9,000 for the Ventura Homeless Service Center.

For this fund raiser, donors were invited to "pay" for a phantom dinner dance. The people on the select guest list for this nonevent were then asked to send invitations to five of their friends so they could

stay at home too.

The funds from this non-event will be used towards the costs of making the Homeless Service Center a reality.

Our sincere thanks to all those who gave of their time and energy to make these fund raisers successful and our thanks as well to those who supported these efforts. ♦

## Don't Throw In the Towel "500" Rally Begins

About three years ago, the S.A.R.A.H. Center started to run short of towels. We held a "Don't Throw In The Towel" 500 Rally to encourage donations. The response was phenomenal.

We are finding ourselves short once again, as towels get worn out with such frequent washing. Since the last rally was so successful, we are going to have another one.

Churches, youth groups, and organizations are invited to "Rally" our community for towels—500 would be great!

Collect as many new or used towels (in good condition) as you can and donate them to the S.A.R.A.H. Center at Project Understanding.

Tell the receptionist how many towels you have and which group you represent when you bring them in.

All participating groups will be proudly announced in the Project Understanding newsletter as a participant in the "Don't Throw In the Towel '500' Rally."

Start today—don't throw in the towel, throw it our way! ♦

## Women of Vision Conference


### Turning the Tide of Prejudice and Violence

The Seventh Annual Women of Vision Conference will be held on Sunday, January 11, 2004 at Ventura Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The cost for the event is \$10 and students are free. Childcare provided for children ages 3-11 by reservation only (Childcare number, 642-5387).

In the spirit of women strengthening community, you are invited to bring unopened toiletries to be donated to Project Understanding.

For more information,



THE SEVENTH ANNUAL  
WOMEN OF VISION  
CONFERENCE

A program of VIMA,  
Ventura Interfaith Ministerial Association

**Turning the Tide  
of Prejudice  
and Violence**

**A Celebration of  
Our Compassionate  
Community**

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**Julie Saltoun**  
TRI-COUNTIES REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE

Featuring:  
**Debbie Golden**  
VUSD BOARD OF EDUCATION,  
1999-2003

**Sunday,  
January 11, 2004  
1:00-4:00 p.m.**

VENTURA SEVENTH DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH  
6300 Telephone Rd.  
Ventura, California  
(805) 642-5387

## Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

**Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed cash during the month of October:**

### Individuals

Judy Alexandre  
Babette Amirkhan  
Arthur & Dennis Anderson  
Ruben & Terrie Andrade  
George & Ellen Appel  
William & Dorothy Asano  
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Marion Baranowski  
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Patricia Vincent  
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Earl & Marcia Wakelee  
Mary Jane Wallace  
Gordon & June Welsh  
Edna & Bernie West  
Troy & Patsy Whitteker  
Doris Williams  
Richard & Shelley Wilmeth  
Joanne Wolf  
John & Paulina Wolfe  
Martin Workens

## Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

In memory of:

Barry Haberstitch

Given by:

George & Joy Berger

Aitken & Susan Birdsall

Richard & Georgiana

Daskais

Tina Elton

John & Glenda Hammer

Bill & Pamela Hicks

Margery Hixon

Barbara Litton

Therese Lynch

Lee & Margaret

Molesworth

Arthur & Jeanne Peters

John & Sue Rains

Barbara Wolf

In memory of:

Barry, son of Bonnie

Carlton

Given by:

Larry & Barbara Meister

In memory of:

Beth Young

Given by:

Betty Harris

In honor of:

Bud Hartzell, 96th

Birthday

Given by:

Jymmye Hitch-Banhart

In memory of:

Clinton (Kiyi) Tatum

Given by:

Margaret Tatum-Potter

In memory of:

Gerald McCool

Given by:

Kendra & Jacqueline

Folsom

In memory of:

Phyllis Goldberg

Given by:

Les Goldberg

In honor of:

The marriage of Kolby

Vaughan and Laurie

Miller

Given by:

Dennis & Loretta Curtin

### Churches & Organizations

Abrisa Industrial Glass Inc.

Affinity Bank

Chicago Title Company

Commission on Human

Concerns/Oxnard

County of Ventura

Eastminster Presbyterian

Church

First Assembly of God of

Ventura

First Baptist Church of Ojai

First Presbyterian Church of

Oxnard

First United Methodist Church

of Ventura, Mariposa

Fellowship

Horizon Foursquare Church

National Semiconductor

Presbytery of Santa Barbara,

Peacemaking

Subcommittee

Pythian Sisters

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

of Ventura

United Methodist Church

California-Pacific Annual

Conference, Ojai United

Methodist Church

United Way of Los Angeles

County

Ventura Seventh-Day

Adventist Church

Ventura Suburban Kiwanis

Club

Westminster Presbyterian

Church

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

### Individuals

Margo Adams

Judy Alexandre

Larry & Kari Brogdin

Ashelei Higuera

Karen Jones

Ann Levasseur

Barry & Kathy Lewis

Anne Lombard

Joan McCray

Charlotte Meador

Jean Nussman

Marty Roggenbuck

Harold W. Ruddick

Dorothy Schupbach

Ann Smith

George & Eleanor Tillquist

Daniel & Joanne Wakelee

Leonard & Marsha Weber

Gordon & June Welsh

Richard & Shelley Wilmeth

### Churches & Organizations

Aliso Escrow, Inc.

Alliance for the Mentally Ill

Anacapa Bread Company

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Church

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Ventura

First United Methodist Church

of Ventura

First United Methodist Church

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of Camarillo

Unitarian Universalist

Church

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Vons Grocery, Telegraph Rd.

Vons Grocery, Thompson

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### Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

## Donate Your Car



### Cars4Causes

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Donate your car, truck, boat or RV to benefit Project Understanding

**1-800-766-2273**



Rheto-Rick

## On Practicing Random Acts of Kindness

By Rick Pearson  
Executive Director

We have all seen the bumper sticker. “Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty.” Do you remember your reaction the first time you heard the phrase? Were you struck, as I was, by the simplicity of the idea and its deep potential to change the world?

The earliest reference to the phrase in print is attributed to Anne Herbert, a peace activist in Berkeley in 1982. It was given wider exposure by columnist Adair Lara in 1991 and turned into a bumper sticker by a college class of Professor Chuck Wall in 1993. Now there is even a foundation who defines what a “random act of kindness” is. (Although, to define a random act seems a contradiction in terms.)

And yet, when Ms. Herbert

put pen to paper in 1982, the volunteers and supporters of Project Understanding had already been practicing random acts of kindness for more than five years.

For it is surely a random act of kindness to provide food or rent money or even shampoo and a shower to someone whom you have never met and indeed might never see again (or even at all).

We may speak of gifts of goods and services as “gifts in kind,” but in a very real sense, every gift, including time and money, is a “gift in kindness.”

The volunteers and donors of Project Understanding are incredibly generous in their acts of kindness, but let us never believe that the flow of kindness is only one way. There is a whole class of people in our society who practice random acts of kindness for the rest of us.

Hear these words from Barbara Ehrenreich (from her book “Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America”) “When someone works for less

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## Highlights

**P. 1:** We’re thankful for all in-kind doantions.

High Holy Days emphasize a time to reach out.

The Dan Stevens Shalom Award to be presented to Dr. Robert Dodge.

**P. 2:** We give thanks to generous local businesses.

**P. 3:** In memoriam—Bobbye Condron.

“No Room at the Inn” nativity display is scheduled for December 5-7.

**P. 5:** Thank you to those who supported recent fund raising efforts.

Don’t Throw in the Towel “500” Rally begins.

Women of Vision Conference: Turning the Tide of Prejudice and Violence.



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