

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers
and supporters of Project
Understanding

Volume XIX No. 12
(Monthly)

December 2004



Upcoming Holiday Opportunities — All Good for You and Your Spirit and Great for Project Understanding

There are several opportunities in the next few weeks for Project Understanding's supporters to have an enjoyable experience and help Project Understanding at the same time.

First there are two opportunities to see a wide variety of Christmas nativity scenes:

The twelfth annual No Room at the Inn will be held on Friday through Sunday, December 10-12, at the St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church in Thousand Oaks. For more detailed information, please turn to page 3.

That same weekend (December 11 and 12) Sylvia Mack will once again have her private collection of nativities on display in her home in Ventura. You may learn more about this display on page 3.

If an evening of music and desserts is more to your liking, the Dessert Concert at College United Methodist Church will be presented on Saturday, December 4, at 7 p.m. at the church. Please turn to page 5 for more information on this event.

Or perhaps you would just like a dinner out with your family. Why not have dinner at Danny's Deli on the evening of Wednesday, December 1. If you mention Project Understanding, Danny's will donate a percentage of your bill to Project Understanding. Want to know more? Please see page 5.

And finally, just in time for your holiday shopping, Borders

Books will donate a portion of what you spend at their store on Friday through Sunday, December 3-5. Just mention Project Understanding when you check out. Please see page 5.

We encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities and support Project Understanding at the same time. ♦

Gifts In-Kind Are Also Kind Gifts

Project Understanding relies on cash donations for more than half of its funding. But we also receive thousands of dollars worth of goods and services as in-kind donations.

In this issue of the Project Understanding News, we highlight and thank some of the many people who make in-kind donations.

Our purpose is two-fold: First (and most obvious) is to express our deep appreciation for these kind donors.

But we also hope that, as you read these examples, you might be moved to consider how you might also be able to consider making gifts like these.

To all of our supporters who make in-kind donations we say, "Thank you." ♦



Help benefit Project Understanding by supporting the following fund raisers:

Danny's Deli Dine Out

Wednesday, December 1, 4 - 9 p.m.

See page 5

Dessert Concert: A Musical Celebration

College United Methodist Church

Saturday, December 4, 7 p.m.

See page 5

No Room at the Inn Nativity Display

St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church

December 10-12

See page 3

Nativity Display at Sylvia Mack's Home

Saturday and Sunday, December 11-12

1-4 p.m., See page 3

Borders Books, Music and Café

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday

December 3, 4, and 5

See page 5

In-Kind Gifts and Services Give a Boost to Students!

By Marcia Wakelee
Tutoring Coordinator

The Tutoring program relies on the efforts of 200 volunteer tutors and on the financial support of our faithful donors. But we also receive in-kind donations and services worth many thousand dollars.

Sunshine Brightens Christmas for Tutoring Students.

Many of our tutoring students come from families who are not able to provide much in the way of Christmas gifts for their children. That is why the tutoring program collects donated toys so that each of our 200 students receives a special Christmas gift.

Sunshine Cheek of Affinity Bank has been a wonderful help in finding these gifts. She puts a large, beautifully decorated toy box in the bank's lobby, and enthusiastically encourages employees and customers to participate.

Thank you, Sunshine, and all the generous folks who help to put a smile on our students' faces at Christmas.

Sue "Decks the Halls" at the Avenue Tutoring Center.

Since 1990, Sue Ellison has volunteered as the resource person who creates the beautiful and educational decorations and displays in the Avenue Center. Her efforts have been featured several times in this newsletter.

Health concerns have made it necessary for Sue to take a break from this service for a while. We miss you, Sue, and

hope that you will be able to come back to us soon.

Ojai's Thacher School Keeps Our Tummies Full.

Thacher student Heather Back was the spark plug behind a recent gift to the Tutoring program. Heather raised funds and organized an event in which Thacher students prepared individual bags of yummy (and healthy) snacks for our students.

After a day at school, our students are often hungry when they come to tutoring, and a healthy snack is just what is needed. How thoughtful of the Thacher students to understand that a snack can really help a child get ready to study. Thank you, Thacher School, for keeping our tummies full.

National Charity League Helps in Many Ways.

The National Charity League (NCL) is an organization of mothers and daughters who serve the community. The Tutoring program has been the grateful recipient of their help in many areas.

Several years ago Kathy Back and her daughter Laurel came up with the idea of Birthday Bags. These are beautifully decorated shopping bags, filled with party favors, a cake mix, frosting, small gifts — everything that is needed to have a birthday party.

NCL mothers and daughters prepare these bags and bring them to delight our students on their birthdays. What a wonderful gift!

Thanks to all these thoughtful in-kind donors. ♦

Holiday Blessings

By Kay Hoyt
Reception Center Coordinator

Thanksgiving always brings to mind those who throughout the year have offered their help and support through donation of their time and much needed supplies. The churches and temples throughout our city and county are remembered by Project Understanding not only for their prayers but for their generous donations throughout the year. Many church members volunteer not only their time, but canned goods, toys, toiletries and even water.

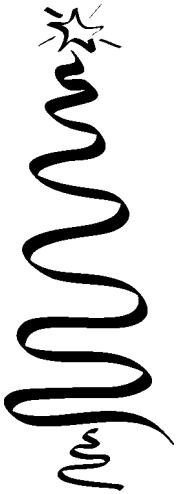
Lions, Optometrists, Kiwanis.

We also extend our thanks to the Ventura Breakfast Lions Club and the Ventura East Lions Club and their optometrists who have provided prescription glasses to our clients each month throughout the year. Additionally, thanks are given to the Ventura Downtown Lions Club for their generous offering of 50 Thanksgiving turkey dinner baskets and the Ventura Suburban Kiwanis for their adoption of four families for the Christmas holidays. These families will each receive toys for the children along with a Christmas dinner basket.

Vta. County, City Fire Depts.

Each Christmas Season the Ventura County and Ventura City Fire Departments "Spark of Love" Toy Drive enables 250 of our clients to receive toys for their families.

Throughout the year we are blessed by our community. We at Project Understanding are



Blessings

Continued From Page 3

thankful for the opportunity of knowing and working with our volunteers and clients. They bring the special gift of themselves to our Thanksgiving table, enhancing our lives. ♦

In-Kind Gifts for Transition House

By Regina Fitz-Gerald
Housing Case Manager

Many have been kind to all the families at Transition House. The donations have come from many places and in many forms.

All the children have received a new coat, new shoes, and a backpack from the **Ventura County Church of Religious Science** for the past three years.

The students at **Thacher School in Ojai** raised money and did all the shopping for the children to each receive gifts for Christmas last year. They will do this again this year for all the children. Thacher School also made Easter baskets for each of the children.

Then **Ventura County Fair** gave every family a pass to the fair and free parking.

The **McGrath Pumpkin Patch** gave the families the opportunity to come and go for a hayride, enjoy the animals and receive a decorative pumpkin.

Vons Grocery Store on Thompson Blvd. donated pumpkins for the children to carve and put on their doorsteps for Halloween.

Alan Alpers decorated the Transition House for Halloween

for all the children and the neighbors. You should go by for Halloween and Christmas and see what he does. He competes with "F" Street in Oxnard.

One of the women received money from the **Ventura Mom's Club** to help pay for her nursing school books. Another woman at Transition House came with no transportation and received a 1993 Eagle from **Linda Andreotti** within a few months of entering Transition House. This year the families

have all received Thanksgiving dinner from the **Lions Club of Ventura** and **Conejo Adventist Elementary School**.

These are examples of the many gifts that have come to the families at Transition House. All of these gifts are a blessing to the families.

As we look ahead please remember all the good we are able to do with your kind, loving donations to our clients and to us. ♦

Two Events: More Than 500 Creches

Once again the public is invited to view two displays of nativity scenes during the weekend of December 10 through December 12.

Sylvia Mack Creche Display.

Sylvia Mack has spent a lifetime collecting nativity sets from all over the world. Her collection includes a wide variety and totals more than 300.

On December 11 and 12, the public is invited to Sylvia's home to view her collection. The open house will be from 1 to 4 p.m. each day. Guests will be invited to make a donation to Project Understanding.

Sylvia Mack's home is located at 7836 El Dorado St. off Kimball in East Ventura.

No Room at the Inn Nativities

For the last dozen years people have thronged to the annual display of nativity scenes assembled at "No Room at the Inn." According to the group's mission statement, "The purpose of No Room at the Inn is to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas by focusing on the humble birth of the blessed

Baby Jesus, 2,000 years ago, and helping those for whom there is also 'No Room at the Inn,' the homeless."

To date this effort has donated nearly \$97,000 to 16 different agencies in Ventura County (including Project Understanding).

As in previous years, there are two ways to enjoy the display. On Friday evening, December 10, there will be a Grand Opening Gala which will include hors d'oeuvres, a no-host wine bar and entertainment. Tickets for the gala are \$20 in advance (before December 8) or \$25 at the door.

On Saturday and Sunday, December 11 and 12, the display will be open from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The suggested donation for these days is \$5 for adults and \$1 for children.

The host for this year's display is St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church located at 5801 Kanan Road in Thousand Oaks (at the corner of Kanan and Lindero Canyon roads.)

For tickets or more information, call Nora at 557-0323 or Judy at 469-5717. ♦



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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 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.

The Bread of Life

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

Danny's Deli Gives Its Support on December 1

Danny's Deli has generously offered to share its profits from one night with Project Understanding. If you eat at Danny's on Wednesday, December 1, between 4 and 9 p.m., and mention Project Understanding to the server when you order, Danny's will donate a percentage of your sale to us.

Danny's is a New York kosher-style delicatessen serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner seven days a week. They specialize in incredible sandwiches (hot, cold, grilled, and double deckers), sumptuous meal salads (Cobb, Caesar, Chinese), and complete dinners with traditional deli items, as well as a variety of charbroiled chicken, beef, and pasta entrees.

Danny's is located at 3263 Telegraph Road in Ventura, across from the Pacific View Mall. ♦

Shop at Borders and Help Project Understanding on the Weekend of December 3, 4, 5

Ready to kick off your holiday shopping and help Project Understanding at the same time? During the weekend of December 3-5, you can do both.

Borders Books, Music and Café is teaming up with Project Understanding for a weekend-long fund raiser. Simply tell the clerk at Borders that you want your purchase to count toward the Project Understanding total. Borders will donate a percentage of all such purchases to us. So whether it is a book for Uncle Max, a music CD for Grandma or just an espresso for yourself, stop in at Borders on December 3, 4 or 5.

Borders is located at the Esplanade in Oxnard. ♦

College Methodist to Give Concert on December 4

For nearly 20 years, the congregation and choir at College United Methodist Church have presented an annual evening of music and desserts to raise funds for Project Understanding.

This year the concert will be held on Saturday, December 4, at 7 p.m. The choir has chosen to perform "Proclamations," a musical celebration of Christmas with words and music by T. L. Pompey. The choir will be under the direction of Jayne Pompey with accompanist Nancy Dolton.

If this year's concert is anything like the past, you will be treated to wonderful music and delicious dessert, and you will go away with a warm heart and a full stomach.

Plan now to attend. College United Methodist Church is located at 4300 Telegraph Road across from Ventura College. ♦



BORDERS.



Shop at Borders on December 3, 4, or 5.

If you tell the clerk your purchase is for Project Understanding, Borders will donate a percentage of the sale to Project Understanding.

No coupon necessary.

Clip this reminder and place it where you will see it so you don't forget.

Borders is at the Esplanade in Oxnard.

Thanks for your support.



Dine at Danny's Deli on December 1.

Simply tell the server you are dining for Project Understanding.

Then Danny's will donate a percentage of your sale to Project Understanding.

No coupon necessary.

Clip this reminder and place it where you will see it so you don't forget.

Danny's is at 3263 Telegraph Rd., Ventura.

Thanks for your support.

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

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

Individuals

Judy Alexandre
Babette Amirkhan
Arthur & Dennis Anderson
Robert Anderson &
 Rose Marie Voelker
Ruben & Terrie Andrade
Roy & Mary Lou Ash
Lorraine Ballance
Edward & Jill Banman
Marion Baranowski
Robert & Marilyn Batelaan
Howard & Linda Bolinger
Barbara Born
Jeffrey Brackett & Miriam
 Arichea
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Gerald & Joanne Cornelius
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Frances Lowe

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Jacqueline Manley
John & Frances Marshall
Frank & Charaline Maxim
Laura Mcavoy
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John & Donna Webb
R. E. & Lynda Whitney
Troy & Patsy Whitteker
Doris Williams

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

In honor of:

Jan & Jim, Happy Holiday Season

Given by:

Harry & Esther Cooperman

In memory of:

Karen Gregorchuk

Given by:

Tom & Pamela Prinz

In memory of:

Mae Briggs

Given by:

Isabel Levitt
Margaret York

In memory of:

Melvina Rodgers

Given by:

Gloria Noble

In honor of:

Roban Benson, Happy Birthday

Given by:

Jymmye Hitch-Banhart

In memory of:

Shirley Avery

Given by:

Pythian Sisters

Churches & Organizations

Amgen Foundation
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Complete Retirement Management Inc.
County of Ventura
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
First Assembly of God of Ventura
First Baptist Church of Ojai
First Presbyterian Church of Oxnard
Horizon Foursquare Church
Jeffrey Herman, Attorney at Law
Korean Women's Association

Ojai Presbyterian Church
St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Ventura

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans

Trinity Lutheran Church United Way

Westminster Presbyterian Church

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

Judy Alexandre
Maya Berry
Maurice & Carol Bickford
Alex Fawcett
Kendra Folsom
Taylor & Lauren Fountain
Danna Friedman
JoAnna Gamble
Callista Gibson
Alexandra & Katherine Hecht
Kara Hewson
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Natalie Smith
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Leonard & Marsha Weber

Churches & Organizations

Alliance for the Mentally Ill
Anacapa Bread Company
Brownie Troop No. 852
Elmhurst School

First Baptist Church of Ventura
First Christian Church
FOOD Share
Mission Uniform & Linen Service
National Charity League
Oxnard Shores Mobile Home Park
Temple Beth Torah
Trader Joe's
Trinity Presbyterian Church of Camarillo
Unitarian Universalist Church
Ventura Missionary Church
Vons Grocery, Harbor Blvd.
Vons Grocery, Telegraph Rd.
Vons Grocery, Thompson Blvd.

Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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The Charity That Gives to Charities

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

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Rheto-Rick

Exchange Rates

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

My sister has lived in London for more than a quarter of a century and I have been fortunate to visit her a few times.



When I am there, it is of course necessary for me to trade my U.S. dollars for British pounds. Now, when I hold a \$10 bill in my hand, I

know exactly what I can buy with it. But when I hold a £10 note I am never sure what it will buy. I have to do some quick mental arithmetic with the exchange rate to know how many dollars it is worth, but I am never sure whether what I am buying is a good value or not. So I usually just ask my sister.

Whenever exchange rates vary internationally there are always plenty of pundits who will tell us what it means. If the dollar is weak, it makes

American goods easier to sell overseas, but it makes foreign goods more expensive for American consumers. So whether a weak dollar is a good thing depends on whether you are an American car manufacturer trying to sell cars in Europe or a BMW dealer trying to sell cars in America.

But here at Project Understanding there is another exchange rate. Instead of thinking about how many pounds a dollar will buy, we think of how many jars of peanut butter a latte will buy.

This is not a polemic against lattes, it is simply an economic decision. But it is an economic decision with a heart.

I hope that you have all the lattes you need, but I also wish that the families who come to us for food had all the peanut butter they needed.

During the month ahead, as we show our love for our family and friends with gifts, please remember the Project Understanding exchange rate and also show your compassion for others with gifts of a different kind. ♦

Highlights

P. 1: Upcoming holiday opportunities are good for you and your spirit and great for Project Understanding.

Gifts in-kind are also kind gifts.

P. 2: In-kind gifts and services give a boost to students.

Holiday blessings from the Reception Center.

P. 3: In-kind gifts for Transition House.

Two events of more than 500 creches.

P. 5: Danny's Deli, Borders, and College United Methodist offer holiday enjoyment.



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Project Understanding at San Buenaventura
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FAX (805) 652-1389

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