

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers and supporters of Project Understanding



Volume XXIV No. 12
(Monthly)

December 2009

Snapshots from November 7 SHORE dedication

See related article on page 2



Drop the Ribbon to Open SHORE. L to R: Judy Alexandre, Bd. president; Deborah Hazen, John Stewart Co.; Rick Pearson, executive director; Mayor Christy Weir.



Residents Sarah and Jackie.



Resident Rose.



Former Bd. president Mindy Johnson.

The SHORE was made possible by the efforts of:

- Project Understanding
- PLACE
- The John Stewart Company
- The Housing Authority of the City of San Buenaventura



Resident Sierra.



Resource mngr. Sandra Morales and resident Dan.

Our thanks to the following individuals and congregations who have adopted units at the SHORE:

Studio Apartments

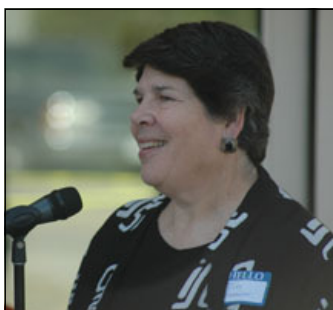
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Ventura
- Ed and Jill Banman and John and Dorothy Sinjem
- Harriet Hillam

One-Bedroom Apartments

- Diane Federle and Bill Corkins in memory of Diane's mother Asella
- Peter and Diane Dowler and Bill and Celia Paterson in memory of Milo

Three-Bedroom Apartment

- The Collart Family



Board President Judy Alexandre.



Mayor Christy Weir.

SHORE dedicated on November 7

34 formerly homeless people move into 15 units.

On Saturday, November 7, 2009, a dedication and open house were held for the opening of the SHORE supportive housing project in downtown Ventura. SHORE stands for Supportive Housing Opportunities in a Residential Environment and the project is part of the WAV (Working Artists Ventura).



Ventura Councilmember Neal Andrews at dedication.

As has been reported in previous newsletters SHORE is a fifteen-unit complex

of permanent supportive housing that now provides a home to thirty-four formerly homeless people.

The photos from this page and page 1 show that this was a day of great excitement. The project was years in the making but the look of joy on the faces of the new residents as well as on the faces of those who played a role in making it a reality was well worth the wait.

Thank you to all the donors and volunteers who have made SHORE a success. ♦

A food pantry without donations like a day without sunshine

By Randy Ringen
Pantry Coordinator

What would a food pantry look like without in-kind

donations? (“In-kind” in this case means direct donations of food, not money.) That sounds like a rather silly question — you’re probably thinking, well, it would be an empty pantry — but don’t dismiss it out of hand. Perhaps a better phrased question would be, how would a pantry be able to give out food without the help of donations of food from the community?

Well, in the case of Focus on Food, the pantry at Project Understanding, we would have to buy it in order to carry out our purpose of serving the needy of western Ventura County. And indeed, we at the pantry often do. Project Understanding buys a considerable amount of food from FOOD Share every week, thanks to grants from the government and various organizations and individuals. We also receive food from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a type of in-kind donation, a very valuable resource, but certainly not one that comes directly from the local community.

So, to rephrase the question once again, what would Focus on Food look like without your donations of canned and fresh food? It would look pretty barren. In fact, we might as well not open our doors. Though we are able to buy a great deal thanks to the generosity of private and public donors, it’s not enough. Without the combined efforts of individuals, churches, nonprofit organizations, and the companies and corporations of Ventura County, we could not provide the three day’s worth of meats, breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, and other items we now are able to give to all who come to Focus on Food each month. Maybe we could give out one day’s amount, and with

little variety, but that’s about it. Your donations count!

But other questions come to mind. One is, is it better to give money or food to the pantry? My answer is both. But if you have to make a choice, you can do either; the money will be used rightly, but the food will be used right away. Will we be able to buy more with our money than our donors could? In some cases, yes. FOOD Share, our major provider, allows us to buy nearly all canned and boxed food items at nineteen cents a pound, much better than we can do at any store. However, FOOD Share, as great as it is and as much as it has, doesn’t always have all the foods we want because they, too, are facing the squeeze all pantries are facing throughout the country: increasing demand, decreasing donations. They don’t always have what we would like to give away.

That’s one reason why I, as a pantry coordinator, love food drives. The sheer number and variety of items the pantry receives from them are a true blessing, and it is the one time of the year the shelves of the pantry are filled. Now is truly the “season of cheer” at Project Understanding, as we receive most of our donations from various organizations collecting for the holidays. If you are interested in organizing a food drive, please contact us at Project Understanding, and we will be glad to assist you.

But if you donate food to us, here are a few guidelines for giving: First, if you would under no circumstances eat it, don’t expect others to, either. I don’t mean you can’t give us that can of spinach because you can’t stand spinach. Rather, if a

Sunshine

Continued From P. 2

can or package is bulging unnaturally, rusted through, heavily dented, or very far past its expiration date, it's no good to us, or to those we give it to. I have a "hall of shame" in my office of old, rusted, ruined cans that have been given to the pantry over the years, and they make a good home for the spiders that spin fly-collecting webs. In most cases I don't know who gave the items, and I don't want to.

Also, the very odd food items don't always go over. For example, if you are tempted to donate that can of Korean caterpillars that you got as a souvenir of your time in Seoul, don't. I already have one. Stick to the staples: beans, rice, tuna, pasta, canned meat, cereal, etc. If you have a garden or fruit trees, we take these donations as well. Fresh foods go over well with our clients, so we like to give them a balance of long-lasting cans and packages and recently picked and prepared goods.

I also love churches that have "food of the month" collections, such as Church of the Foothills, First United Methodist Church, or Eastminster Presbyterian Church. These churches provide a monthly shot-in-the-arm of a particular food the pantry is short of. They also give their congregations an item easy to remember and collect. If you are interested in instituting a food of the month system for your group, contact Project Understanding, and we will be glad to provide you with a list of items needed.

And as I like to do with all of these articles, I'd like to end with thanks to all of you for your continued giving and assis-

tance. Your giving forms the backbone of Focus on Food. These are challenging times — as I write this, unemployment is officially at 12 percent in Ventura County, and the pantry has just served more than 1,300 people for the month of October. You have been responding, and your sacrifices are most appreciated by the many who come to Project Understanding to meet that most basic of needs, to eat. Whatever you conceive heaven to be, know that your reward will be great for what you have done. In fact, you don't even have to wait for heaven; you can enjoy now the great satisfaction of living, even just a little, for others and easing their need. ♦

Tutoring thankful for in-kind gifts

By Maria Gonzalez
Tutoring Coordinator

In our tutoring program we receive many generous and useful gifts every year. We thank everyone who helps us to better provide our students with the support they need. We give these items the best use possible. Thank you for helping us on improving our wonderful program. These are some of those special gifts:

Tools for education

In our centers, students can find everything they need to do their homework, from pencils and paper, to reading books and games. As you can imagine, we need a lot of supplies.

Last August we received a wonderful donation from La Mariposa School in Camarillo. They donated forty-nine tool

See Tutoring on P. 5

Introducing new Reception services coordinator Alicia Ayala

By Todd Goehner
Client Services Manager

Project Understanding has a new addition to its staff: Alicia Ayala. Alicia is the Reception services coordinator and also the Avenue site coordinator for the tutoring program.



Alicia brings a broad background of skills and experience to this newly created position. She is bilingual, fluent in Spanish, and has been both a case manager and tutor.

Here is how she describes herself:

"My name is Alicia Ayala. I was born and raised in Ventura County. I moved out of the area to attend California State University, Los Angeles, where I graduated with a B.A. in Latin American studies.

"My previous work experience includes working as a parent educator for the Lawndale School District, in program that collaborated with First 5 L.A.

"Some of the things I enjoy are reading, traveling, hiking and helping others."

Project Understanding is blessed to have Alicia as part of an already outstanding staff. Welcome, Alicia! ♦



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Randy Ringen
Pantry 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 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 is working with a coalition of interested agencies and individuals to provide permanent supportive housing for homeless people.

The Bread of Life

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

Tutoring

Continued from P. 3

boxes that include a box of pencils, scissors, erasers, crayons, and pencil sharpener. These boxes were distributed to our six sites. Thank you to them and their representative, Cindy Laudato Wong.

Playing to learn

Our students are rewarded with playtime when they finish their work. The organization Delta Kappa Gamma International (Delta Chapter) believes that our kids can learn while they play and donated science and math games to our program. These games are a great addition to our tutoring sessions. We thank this organization, especially Sylvia Mack, who delivered the games to us.

Many thanks to individuals and organizations who have given in-kind donations to the tutoring program this year. Our labor wouldn't be possible without your support. ♦

Thank you, Ventura Rentals

Over the course of the last six months we have , moved clients into Transition House, picked up furniture donations, made trips to the recycling center and moved our case manager into the new SHORE office.

Through the generosity of Ted and Perry Cook of Ventura Rentals, we have been able to accomplish this at no charge to the agency. We owe a debt of gratitude to them and encourage you to utilize Ventura Rentals the next time you need to rent a truck or other equipment. ♦

\$MILE event on September 26 had a mile of smiles!

A group of hardy volunteers laid down a mile of facsimile dollar bills in Ventura's Community Park at Kimball and Telephone roads on Saturday, September 26. A special thanks to the members of the Zeta Pi Omega service sorority at CSU Channel Islands who helped lay down the dollars and also brought along nearly \$550 that they had raised. This was a part of the total of \$6,000 raised by the event. The four pictures below were taken at the event.



Thank you to our \$MILE sponsors

Four-Minute Miler

Mark and Janet Goldenson
Jay & Mindy Johnson
Sylvia Mack
Wallace Pearson
Dorothy Prairie
DeDe Taylor
Les & Judy Vielbig
Dale & Mary Watson
Zeta Pi Omega

Half Miler

Judy Alexandre
Ralph & Kay Armstrong
Pamela Chan

Half Miler (continued)

Bill Corkins & Diane Federle
Bryan & Carrie Fisch
Gary & Nancy Lairmore
Louis & Susan Samonsky
Salvatore & Mary Saputo
Bruce & Signe Smale
Coastline Bible Church
Soroptimist International of Ventura

Quarter Miler

Judith Chamberlin
Jeanne Jensen
Robert & Susan Talmadge



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
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 William & Dorothy Asano
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 Jay Johnson
 Given by:
 Ryan Thelen

In memory of:
 Jymmye Hitch-Banhart
 Given by:
 Camilis Harkins

In memory of:
 Marvin Bolinger
 Given by:
 Bruce & Signe Smale

In honor of:
 Rick Pearson
 Given by:
 Edward & Diane Zeamba

Churches & Organizations

A Touch of Love Foundation
 Church of the Foothills
 Church World Service, Inc.
 City of San Buenaventura

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

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First United Methodist Church of
Ventura
Gordon Ross Medical Foundation
Ojai Presbyterian Church
Pythian Sisters
St. Paul's Episcopal Church of
Ventura
The John Stewart Company
Trinity Lutheran Church
United Way of Ventura County
United Way, Other
United Way, Other, United Way
of Central Maryland
Vanguard Charitable Endowment
Program, Barna Family Fund
Ventura Seventh-Day Adventist
Church

**Thank you to the following
people and groups who contrib-
uted food and other items to
our program in October:**

Individuals

Bill & Diana Borchard
Les Goldberg
Frank & Dianne Maggio
Mercy Sanchez
Cindy Saucedo
Bruce & Signe Smale

Churches & Organizations

Community Presbyterian Church
CVS Pharmacy
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
First United Methodist Church of
Ventura
FOOD Share
Pizza Hut
Trader Joe's
Trinity Lutheran Church
Unitarian Universalist Church
Vons

Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

Sustaining donors

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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Roy & Mary Lou Ash
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Rheto-Rick

The long and winding road

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

Well, it was a great day recently when we celebrated the fact that thirty-four people who a week before had not had a place to call home now had a door to open that leads to a place of their own with a roof over their heads. We symbolically opened a door, but what is more important are the fifteen doors that they now open and close every day.

The Beatles got it right. It was a long and winding road that led to this door. It was well over a dozen years ago that the Board of Directors of Project

Understanding decided that we needed to find a way to meet the needs of homeless families and individuals in our community. The shape of that dream has morphed and changed over the years but the basic dream has remained the same — to provide a way to help transform the lives of homeless families and individuals — to help them move from homelessness to permanent housing. Our dream of moving people from homelessness to permanent housing today is a reality.

Thirty-four people who last week did not have a place to call home now have a door to open that leads to a place of their own with a roof over their heads. A long and winding road led to this door, but for them, a new and hopefully straighter road is just beginning. ♦

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of:



To Contact Us

On the Web
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