

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers
and supporters of Project
Understanding

Volume XIX No. 2
(Monthly)

February 2004



Why I Support the Homeless Service Center

By Neal Andrews
Councilmember
City of San Buenaventura



Neal Andrews,
Councilmember,
City of San
Buenaventura

The day after my wife and I were married we traveled to Philadelphia to start our new life. I had a fellowship at the university, and we were about to start an exciting new venture together. And incredible as it may seem today, we had no concrete plan about how to do it.

We had no place to live. We had no jobs lined up. We knew no one in the city. In fact, our mutual knowledge of Philadelphia could be summed up by the fact that I had once traveled through the city in the middle of the night on a Greyhound bus.

We arrived in Philadelphia with seven dollars in cash, an oil company credit card, and my dad's Elk's club membership card. My dad had made me take it at the wedding reception, telling me that if I ever needed help I should just go to the Elks Lodge and tell them my dad was an Elk.

It wasn't that we had not thought through this move. We had given it a lot of thought. We knew we'd have to make find-

ing a place to live our first priority. I had carefully studied the literature from the university, so I knew we would be given a listing of apartments in the area, along with a rent guide to help us avoid being ripped off by unscrupulous landlords. Of course, no one mentioned the fact that there was no guarantee that any of the apartments were actually available for rent, nor did it occur to us that there would be thousands of students competing to rent those few that were available and we'd all be working from the same list.

To make a long story short, it took us days to find an apartment to rent. Our cash was spent the first day, mainly on a motel thirty miles out of town, which was the closest we could find for less than seven dollars.

Important lessons learned.

I learned several important things from this early experience. I learned that my wife was an extremely resilient and resourceful person. I learned that you can cook a fairly decent soup on the manifold of an idling V-8 engine. I learned that some gasoline station owners would let you get \$20 cash back on a credit purchase, but they had to show it as a tire purchase on the credit slip. I learned that banks will not cash checks or open an account if you do not have an address. I

See Andrews, Page 3

Basic Healthcare Provided to Over 750 Clients

By Louise Toutant, Healthcare
for the Homeless

The Healthcare for the Homeless staff has provided healthcare services to over 750 clients this past year at Project Understanding. Two afternoons per week a nurse practitioner and certified medical assistant offer free medical care to clients who reside in their car, on the streets, at the



Louise Toutant (L) and Lupe Bravo
of Healthcare for the Homeless
offer free medical care to
Project Understanding clients.

riverbottom, in transitional living centers and recovery homes.

Louise Toutant and Lupe Bravo share the responsibilities, on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, with Barbara Bellfield and Sheryl Thomas. Louise Toutant and Barbara Bellfield

See Healthcare, Page 2

Donation Makes New Pantry Floor Possible

By Lynn Austin
Program Manager



Volunteer Jean Nussman provided for the new floor covering recently installed in the Food Pantry.

Back on the 13th of September last year, several community members volunteered in United Way's Day of Caring at Project Understanding. One of those people was Jean Nussman. She and a few of her friends painted the interior of the pantry entry. It took most of the morning. As she was working, she noticed that the floor was covered with outdoor carpeting. She mentioned to Joe Anguino, the pantry coordinator, that she thought linoleum would be easier to clean and more sanitary. Joe agreed.

The next day, Jean called Project Understanding and agreed to pay for the flooring. Joe, delighted at the prospect of a new floor and having the necessary skills, insisted on installing the floor himself. He worked it into his busy schedule, and before the Christmas season, the floor was laid. Jean came to see Joe's handiwork. We thank Jean and Joe. ♦

Sheila Kay Leaves P.U. Staff

We are sorry to have to announce that, due to budget constraints, Sheila Kay, case manager for transitional housing, has had to leave the Project Understanding staff.

Sheila has served faithfully in her position for more than five years. Unfortunately,

budget constraints made it necessary for the board to combine two 30-hour per week case management positions into one full-time position.

Project Understanding, and especially, the families who lived in transitional housing during her tenure, express deep appreciation to Sheila for her dedicated service and wish her well in her future endeavors. ♦

Healthcare

Continued From Page 1

are both graduates of the master's program at the University of California at Los Angeles with a specialization in family practice. Lupe Bravo and Sheryl Thomas are certified medical assistants who work alongside the nurse practitioners who visit a total of seven clinics each week.

Healthcare for the Homeless (HCH) staff provide episodic care to walk-in clients as well as ongoing care for clients with health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

In early November the census at Project Understanding began to rise as clients updated their TB skin tests to enter the Winter Shelter. In addition to providing TB clearance, HCH staff perform physical examinations, electrocardiograms (EKG), draw blood and obtain X-rays for clients at the Ventura County Medical Center, and provide free over-the-counter and prescriptive medications.

Other popular clinic services include referrals for free vision care and eyeglasses at Clinicas Del Camino Real and referrals for free dental care at the Salvation Army in Oxnard. Since our staff manages many clients who require medications to control ongoing medical problems we have the ability to enroll them in drug assistance programs to ensure a continuous supply of their medications.

We feel blessed to have the opportunity to visit Project Understanding each week and are grateful to the staff who help us. We would not be able to serve so many clients without the help of Rene, Shari, Regina, Linda, Lynn and Joe. ♦

CROP WALK

"We walk because they walk."

Ventura and Oxnard-Port Hueneme Sunday, March 14

Plan now to walk or to sponsor a walker.
To participate, contact the recruiter
in your congregation or call:

Ventura Walk Coordinator
Renata Hundley at 658-7446

or

Oxnard-Port Hueneme Coordinator
Cloene Marson at 983-8111

Andrews

Continued From Page 1

learned that, even in big cities, there were good-hearted people who would give you a place to stay and feed you and ask nothing in return, if you were lucky enough to find them. And I learned that the Elks really would do just about anything to help you if your dad was an Elk. (I'm also proud to be an Elk to this day.)

I subsequently learned that these lessons would come in handy more than once in life, and that life can present any of us great challenges with little warning or time to prepare.

Life lessons lead to action.

These life lessons are among the reasons I'm proud to be a part of Project Understanding's effort to provide a more reliable, readily available solution for people with emergency housing needs and transitional assistance programs for the homeless in Ventura.

I was pleased to be asked by former Mayor Ray Di Guilio to serve as the Ventura City Council's liaison on social service issues, organizations and programs, including Project Understanding. When I was asked by the Project Understanding Board of Directors to serve as co-chair of the Homeless Service Center Site Committee, it fit well into my City Council responsibilities.

City Council's next steps.

After the City Council received the report of the Committee and the recommended sites were published in the newspaper, few e-mails or letters to the City Council

offered unqualified support for the project. Some objected to the use of city resources. Some said it would make Ventura a magnet for undesirables who would come here for a free ride. Predictably, the vast majority would start out by noting how they really supported the concept in principle, but . . . street repair was more important, the population using such centers was dangerous and criminally inclined or mentally unbalanced, the sites near their homes or businesses were inappropriate for . . . (you fill in the reason, any reason will do).

Still, a majority of the City Council had agreed that facilitating the Project Understanding effort was a high priority goal and they remained steadfast. City staff was directed to lead the effort to attempt to negotiate the purchase of one of the recommended sites.

It's been ten months since that directive was approved. Negotiations are still under

way, and the outcome is unclear.

Meanwhile, much has changed. The fiscal integrity of the City is being attacked by a state government bent on seizing local revenue to pay for its profligacy and incompetence. A new City Council has been seated with two new, unseasoned members. A new City Manager, who will inevitably have his or her own ideas and priorities, will be appointed within months. Consequently, more questions will be legitimately raised as to the appropriate priorities for city government.

Thus, it is now more critical than it has been in quite some time for supporters of this project to be heard. Site acquisition activities must not be allowed to lag. The Council will likely review its priority projects within the next few months.

Now is the time to let the Council know your views. ♦

Towels? Yes, We Have Towels!

During the past few months we have been asking for people to donate towels for the SARAH Center.

We are happy to report that you have responded generously. More than 700 towels have been received and our closets are full.

We are especially grateful to the members of two congregations: Bible Fellowship Church (who supplied nearly 350 towels) and Olivet Baptist Church (who donated 200).

A complete list of the individuals, congregations and organizations who donated towels can be found in the

"thank you" pages on page 7.

On behalf of all the clean and dry people who use the SARAH Center, we extend our heartfelt thanks. ♦



Shari Kempton, SARAH coordinator, and volunteer Jim Heath, are folding lots of towels. Over 700 have been recently donated to Project Understanding.

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Linda Simson
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

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.

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed cash to our program during December.

Individuals

Denise Abdun-Nur
 Judy Alexandre
 Babette Amirkhan
 Robert Anderson & Rose Marie Voelker
 Arthur & Dennis Anderson
 Ruben & Terrie Andrade
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 Marilyn Lemieux

In memory of:
 Bessie Hooker
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 Gene & De Lois Greer

In memory of:
 Bobbye Condron
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 Paul & Thava Merrett
 George Myers
 Charles & Jeannette
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In honor of:
 Bryan Fisch, D.D.S., from
 his Staff on his "milestone"
 birthday
 Given by:
 Howard & Linda Bolinger

In honor of:
 Charlie & Jerry Fletcher
 for their faithful service as
 volunteers for the Food
 Pantry
 Given by:
 Les & Judy Vielbig

In honor of:
 Diane Sue Rennell
 Given by:
 John & Jeanne Rennell Fund

In honor of:
 Dr. Cherry
 Given by:
 Richard & Ellen Pearson

In honor of:
 Dr. Peter Karlsberg & Staff
 Given by:
 Celes Buck

In honor of:
 Dr. Arthur Flynn & Staff
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 Dr. Martha Gonzalez & Staff
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In honor of:
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In honor of:
 Dr. Ross Kaplan & Staff
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In memory of:
 My husband, Alexander
 Scotland
 Given by:
 Virginia Scotland

In honor of:
 Lou & Dan Lincoln
 Given by:
 Douglas & Jean Jereska

In memory of:
 Marion Hofve
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 Ruberda Vigen

In memory of:
 Maureen Herman
 Given by:
 Doyle & Anita Smith

In honor of:
 Mr. & Mrs. I. C. Maust
 Given by:
 Art & Jean Marshall

In honor of:
 Ofelia Cervantez for her
 devotion to the children of
 Saticoy
 Given by:
 Earl & Marcia Wakelee

In honor of:
 Olga Munro
 Given by:
 Carol Ann Rose

In memory of:
 Our mother Myrna Stiles
 Given by:
 Sandra Stiles

In memory of:
 Our son Michael Collins
 Given by:
 Matthew & Lillian Collins

In honor of:
 Paul Benson
 Given by:
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In memory of:
 Rebecca Singer-Beilin
 Given by:
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In memory of:
 Rosie
 Given by:
 Richard & Ellen Pearson

In memory of:
 Rovida Whittington
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In honor of:
 Steve, Jan & Tim Hitchcock
 Given by:
 Douglas & Patricia Lochner

In honor of:
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In honor of:
 William Corkins & Diane
 Federle
 Given by:
 James & Janet Corkins

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 United Way of Central Maryland
 Ventura County Contractors Association
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 Ventura Lodge #201

Ventura Missionary Church
 Vista Ford of Oxnard
 Westminster Presbyterian Church
 William L. Morris-Fillmore (Trucks)
 Wood-Claeysens Foundation

Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed food and other items to our program in the month of December.

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Gary Adkinson
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Churches & Organizations

Business Network
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Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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Rheto-Rick

Far From the Roaring Crowd

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

In the early 1960s, I was a kid in the San Fernando Valley dreaming of becoming a big league baseball player. I didn't even know what baseball was until the Dodgers moved west in 1958, but after they won the World Series in 1959, I was hooked.

When the Angels came along in 1961 I considered them interlopers on the turf of my beloved Dodgers, but they had a couple of players I liked. Albie Pearson (for obvious reasons) and Leon Wagner.

I just learned that Leon Wagner died early this year. His obituary said that he died at home. What it didn't say was that "home" was an electrical shed next to a dumpster behind a video store in South Central Los Angeles.

Wagner's final home was just a few miles from the site of

the old Wrigley Field in Los Angeles where he and the rest of those first Angels played before tens of thousands of fans.

His memorial service was attended by 25 people, none from major league baseball.

In some ways Wagner's life after baseball was typical for black players in the late sixties who retired without pensions and without connections. He tried and failed at several businesses. He became more depressed and turned to drugs. He either refused or was unable to accept the help that was offered to him.

Those who saw him on the street had a hard time believing he had been a major league ballplayer. Homeless people often have grand stories about their past.

For some Leon Wagner's death is a tragic example of what drugs will do to a person. For others it shows how sad it is that our society turns our backs on those whom we once cheered. For me it is a by now all-too-familiar story of someone about whom I cared lost to life on the streets. ♦

Highlights

P. 1: Why Neal Andrews supports the Homeless Service Center.

Basic healthcare is provided to over 750 Project Understanding clients.

P. 2: A donation makes the new Food Pantry floor possible.

Sheila Kay leaves the Project Understanding staff.

CROP Walk March 14

P. 3: Towels? Yes, we have towels!



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