

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers and supporters of Project Understanding



Volume XXV No. 2
(Monthly)

February 2010

The Chosen Ones

By Jim Grimes
SARAH Coordinator

We hear the chosen one used in many ways. One thing I think of when I hear this phrase are the volunteers here at Project Understanding and the SARAH Center. Each person who comes to volunteer gives of their time to help others. The common thread among many of them is they seem to think that their lives have been so blessed that they have the need to give back to their community. Volunteers are special people because they know they have been chosen by God. They work week after week with our staff to keep what we call "Project Understanding" going.

But not just our volunteers know that they are chosen. Let me explain.

In the past few years many of the staff have been working on something called the WAV (Working Artists Ventura). The WAV is an affordable apartment complex for artists at Ventura Avenue and Thompson Boulevard. Within this complex are fifteen units of permanent supportive housing known as



Donald, one of the new SHORE residents, beams with happiness in his new apartment.

SHORE (Supportive Housing Opportunities in a Residential Environment). SHORE has proven to be something that we as staff wanted to become a part of. I am proud of the staff and effort they have put into making this dream come true. To know in some small way that we have changed people's lives by providing them with a home is quite an accomplishment.

This is where the chosen ones come in again. When the SHORE was ready for occupancy there were more than 150

See Chosen on P. 2

SARAH Showers Are Upgraded

By Jim Grimes
SARAH Coordinator

The showers in the SARAH Center have received a much needed upgrade with the installation of tile on the walls and ceiling.

Usage of the SARAH Center services is up 50% from just a couple of years ago. An average of forty people take showers each day now. Due to this increase the showers were well worn and had become quite unsightly.

All the clients using the shower facilities have expressed how happy they are with the improvements. Some of the comments I have heard are, "I can't believe the difference . . . it's so clean." "It's like showering at a fancy hotel . . ." "How great of Project Understanding to put that much effort in just for us . . ." As the person responsible for cleaning the showers I also appreciate what has been done for the clients.

This was all made possible through the generosity of Al Lowe Construction and his staff.

Al Lowe donated all the labor and took no profit on the job charging only for the materials.

See Showers on P. 3

Food Pantry Grand Opening at Vince Corner

Saturday, February 13
10 a.m. to 12 Noon

Corner of Ventura Ave.
and Vince St.

Refreshments, tours and dedication

Please see the related article on page 2



Chosen

Continued From P. 1

applicants for the fifteen units.

Donald was one of the lucky Project Understanding clients who was chosen to move into SHORE.



In his new SHORE apartment, Donald (c), greets Todd Goehner of Project Understanding (r) and a Pepperdine student (l) at the SHORE grand opening last November.

Donald came to the Ventura area looking for work. He had some savings, thinking he would find a job within a short time. This did not happen. His savings were gone and he began living in his car. Someone suggested he buy a tent and find some safe place to pitch it. Eventually he found a job in a downtown bookstore. Now he had some money coming in but not enough to rent an apartment or a room.

Then SHORE came along, and for Donald it was a blessing. He signed up hoping to get in one of the fifteen apartments. After many weeks and interviews, he was one of the “chosen ones.” On a beautiful Saturday in Ventura Donald, along with forty-two others, moved into their new homes. It was a joyous day for all. I have seen Donald since that day and you can see the happiness on his face. He looks ten years younger because he feels safe.

The year 2009 has been a great year for Donald. It was for me as well. I have a wonderful staff of volunteers. I could not end this article without mentioning the people I work with at SARAH. They are Mariann Davis, Nita Perkins, and Sheri Thomas. I would like to thank my soup ladies from Ojai: Kathy Yee, Julie Bloomer, and Terry Allen, who help to feed our clients. They all make SARAH what it is today. These people are who I believe are the “chosen ones.” They have been chosen by the Lord to care for the people who are most in need. ♦

Vince Corner Becomes the New Pantry Site

❑ The Avenue Tutoring move to E.P. Foster makes Pantry relocation possible.

Late last summer, the Avenue tutoring site moved from the location at the corner of Vince Street and Ventura Avenue into a space on the campus of E.P. Foster Elementary School.

The move made sense because most of the students who are tutored at that site attend E.P. Foster. It is a good site for the students and the school is happy to have the tutoring offered right on the campus.

But the main reason why we at Project Understanding were happy to make the move is that it allowed us to improve the services of the Project Understanding Food Pantry.

To be sure, we would not have moved the tutoring site if we could not have found a site where we could continue to

tutor the children who need the service so badly. But, once we came to an agreement with the school district, we were able to move forward in our plans to expand the space for the Pantry.

For more than twenty years, the Pantry has existed in a small lean-to space at the very back of the old fire station that is Project Understanding’s home. The ceiling is low, the floor is rough and uneven and the space small.

But now, with the help of a Boy Scout who is earning his Eagle Award and many volunteers spending countless hours, the former tutoring site is just about ready to become the new home of the Food Pantry. (Watch next month’s issue of the Project Understanding News for a more detailed description of this transformation.)

The building at Vince Corner was a local pharmacy from the time that the building was built in the 1930s until the pharmacist retired in 1989. Project Understanding has occupied the building since that time. For five years, the site housed the Vince Corner Family Lodge where formerly homeless families could stay while they were saving the money necessary to regain permanent housing.

When Project Understanding acquired the apartment building in Oxnard to do transitional housing, the building on Vince Corner became the Avenue Tutoring site and so it remained until last fall.

Now it is ready to begin its new life as the site for the Pantry. And we want all of our friends and supporters to come see this new Pantry home. Come to an Open House, scheduled for February XX from XX to XX. There will be refreshments, tours and a dedication. See you then. ♦

Showers

Continued From P. 1

Project Understanding and the SARAH Center staff and clients want to express their gratitude for this much appreciated donation.

Thank you to all! ♦

The Old Shower



Over the years the SARAH showers experienced considerable deterioration. Here's one as it appeared before the upgrade.

The Renovated Shower



Here's the same shower as the one pictured above only after the extensive upgrade. Note the beautiful, shiny, new tile work.

Annual Donor Letters Mailed

Each January, Project Understanding mails letters to all individual or family donors who gave a total of \$200 or more during the previous year. This is done to ensure that our records are correct and also to provide these donors with a concise record for tax purposes.

If you received this letter, please review it carefully. If you have questions or find a discrepancy with your records, please call business manager Gloria Lewis at 652-1326, ext 824.

If you did not receive this letter and you donated \$200 or more, call Gloria and she will be happy to send you another copy.

Of course, if you need a duplicate receipt for any donation you have made to Project Understanding, regardless of the size of the gift or the total for the year, please feel free to call.

Nearly 60% of Project Understanding's funding comes from donations. Because you help us, we can help others. Thank you to all those who supported us during 2009. ♦

Compassion

Continued From P. 8

plays a big part in what we do around here at Project Understanding. So when Karen Armstrong says that compassion is the test of our spirituality, she has my attention.

I am afraid that for too many of us, when we hear the word "spirituality," we have thoughts of our prayer life or our relationship with God or, at the very least, what we believe about God. But for Armstrong it

is none of those things. She says it is not what we pray or what we believe, it is what we do. And not just what we do, but why we do what we do.

Here is what she says next: "Basically all the world traditions have developed their own version of what's been known as the 'Golden Rule.' This requires constant transcendence of yourself. It requires us constantly to 'de-throne' ourselves from the center of our world. To look into our own hearts, to discover what gives us pain, and then refuse under any circumstance whatsoever, to inflict that pain on anybody else. If you do this all day and every day you are in a state of continual *ekstasis* [from which we get our word *ecstasy*] as the Greeks said. A word that doesn't just mean an exotic trance, but which means a stepping outside of the self. Now we have started to concentrate far too much on what we are transcending to — what we are going to — instead of saying what we are transcending from — what we are getting beyond. . . . What holds us back from our best selves and from the reality that's been called God is greed which imprisons us, if you like, which holds us back by enclosing us in a little selfish bubble. Now if we step outside that . . . we do enter a new state of consciousness."

So now we know that those who give of themselves through Project Understanding are very compassionate (which we knew already). But we also know that acting on that compassion makes them truly spiritual. And that they are in a state of *ecstasy* — transcending their own greed and selfishness and stepping outside of the self and meeting the reality of God. ♦



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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 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.

GoodSearch

What if even a fraction of the billions of dollars generated by search engine advertisers and online shopping was directed towards the work of Project Understanding here in Ventura County?

That is the concept behind GoodSearch.com a search engine powered by Yahoo! GoodSearch donates 50% of its revenue, approximately a penny per search, to the charities designated by its users. You use it *exactly* as you would any other search engine and the pennies add up quickly — just 500 people searching four times a day will earn around \$7,300 in a year. It doesn't cost the users a thing!

Similarly with GoodShop.com, consumers are helping their favorite causes by shopping at hundreds of well known retailers including Amazon, Target, Apple, Macy's, Best Buy, Orbitz, Staples and others. The shop-

ping experience and the prices are exactly the same as going to the retailer directly, but by going through GoodShop, up to 30% of the purchase price is donated to the user's favorite cause!

Project Understanding is registered with the sites, giving you the chance to raise money when you search the Internet or shop online. The goal is to earn \$5,000 through the site this year.

Using GoodSearch is simple. Because the site is powered by Yahoo, you are assured of high quality results — but each time you search, money is generated by the advertisers for Project Understanding.

You search the web and shop online anyway. Why not raise money for Project Understanding at the same time. There is absolutely no reason not to use GoodSearch and GoodShop — it's so easy. ♦

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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This Newsletter Available by E-mail

In order to enter the twenty-first century and to cut printing and mailing costs, the Project Understanding News is now available by e-mail.

This can be a win-win situation. Project Understanding saves money by not having to print an extra newsletter and saves again by not having to mail it.

You have the advantage of getting the newsletter directly and seeing the photographs in color. And you know that you are freeing up funds to do the

real work of the agency — helping those who come through our doors.

At your request, an electronic version of the newsletter (in pdf format) will be e-mailed to your inbox on the last Thursday of the month.

It is easy to switch from the hard copy of the newsletter to the e-version. Simply send an e-mail to Sandra Morales at smorales@projectunderstanding.org with the message asking for the e-version of the Project Understanding News. ♦



Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

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

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Helen Archer
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Ernest & Laura Gulovsen

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Given by:
Karen Spoentgen

In memory of:
Dora Lou Alvarez
Given by:
Maxine Culp

In memory of:
Dorie Alvarez
Given by:
Soroptimist International of
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In honor of:
Joan Bergstrand
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Colleen & John Bergstrand

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**Thank you to the following
people and groups who con-
tributed food and other
items to our program in
the month of December:**

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Ventura Center for Spiritual
Living

Ventura Missionary Church
Vons, Thompson Blvd.

Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson



Rheto-Rick

Compassionate Spirituality

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

Karen Armstrong is a scholar of church historian and world religions. I heard her interviewed recently on the radio. When she was asked about “transcendence” and whether all religion was a search for that which transcends humanity, her response surprised me.

She said that we understand of transcendence “by performing the rituals of the church and by adopting a self-emptying life-style that gets beyond egotism and greed and which especially does that by the means of a compassionate life-style.”

She goes on to say that all the world traditions hold to “this notion of compassion as the litmus test, if you like, of true spirituality.”

Obviously, compassion

See Compassion on P. 3

Save the Date for Rick Pearson’s Farewell

Thursday, April 22

4:30-7:00 p.m.

**Wedgewood Center
Ventura**

Rick Pearson will be stepping down at the end of April after twenty years as executive director of Project Understanding.

Come celebrate Rick’s many years of service and leadership.

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of:



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