

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers
and supporters of Project
Understanding

Volume XVIII No. 6

June 2003



City Council Agrees to Acquire Site for Homeless Service Center

On Monday, May 5, 2003, the City Council of the City of Ventura approved a resolution accepting the list of seven potential sites for the Ventura Homeless Service Center. The resolution also authorized City staff to enter into negotiations to acquire one of the sites.

Last month we reported the completion of the work of the

site selection committee for the Ventura Homeless Service Center. After six months of work, that committee submitted a primary list of seven sites to the board of directors along with a list of secondary sites.

The board approved that list and, in turn, submitted it to the City for its consideration.

On May 5, about 50 people stayed to the very end of the City Council meeting to show their support for the Homeless Center and to encourage the Council to accept the recommendation. The Council's vote was unanimous in favor of

See City Council, Page 2

Project Understanding Needs Your Help to End Fiscal Year in the Black

This month marks the end of Project Understanding's fiscal year. It has been a successful year in many ways. The Ventura Homeless Service Center has taken several huge steps towards reality. Hundreds of children have been tutored. Scores of families that faced eviction have been kept in their homes. Thousands of hungry people have been fed.

But this success is not free. Project Understanding relies on private donations for well over half of its income. The people and congregations of Ventura County have been very generous and we greatly appreciate that support. But last year we came up short. We ran at a deficit and had to use cash reserves to balance the budget. We cannot afford to do that again this year.

Please consider making an extra "end of the year" gift. Gifts of any amount will be greatly appreciated and will help us end the fiscal year in the black. ♦



Clergy Invited to a Meeting on the Ventura Homeless Service Center

All clergy serving congregations in Ventura are cordially invited to attend an update meeting on the status of the Ventura Homeless Service Center.

Co-Hosted by South Coast Fellowship
and
Project Understanding

Thursday, June 5, 2003
10:00 to 11:30 a.m.

At South Coast Fellowship
4050 Market Street
Ventura

Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction Planned for October

The Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction has been scheduled for Saturday, October 11, 2003.

As the name implies, the theme of the auction will be home improvement with all of the auction items for sale relating to that motif.

Even though the event is still several months away, there are a number of ways that you can plan now to be involved.

First, you or your business or organization can be a sponsor of the event. Sponsorship levels include:

Foundation Sponsor
\$5,000

Bricks and Mortar Sponsor
\$1,000 - 4,999

Ladder and Tool Sponsor
\$500 - 999

Hammer and Nails Sponsor
\$250 - 499

If you are interested in being a sponsor at any of these levels, please call Project Understanding (652-1326) and speak to Kendra. She can let you know what gifts and rewards accompany each sponsor level.

Second, you can make a donation of goods or services related to the home improvement theme. Some examples of possible donations are handyman services, gardening, painting, landscaping, cement work, and home improvement tools and supplies. Just let your

imagination run wild—as long as it relates to home improvement.

Third, you can volunteer either during the planning of the event or, just as importantly, for the day of the event. We need committee members who can help plan the event and we need a whole cadre of people to make the event a reality.

If you can donate or volunteer, please call Kendra at 652-1326. ♦

Who Are the Homeless in Ventura County?

For the past seven years, the Ventura County Homeless and Housing Coalition has sponsored a point in time survey of homeless persons.

As the name implies, this survey is not intended to identify every person who is homeless in Ventura County over a period of time. It does not even identify every person who is homeless on a given night. It does identify and interview every adult who sought shelter on a given night in February in Ventura County.

As with previous surveys, some commonly held stereotypes are challenged by the results. For example, more than half of the people who were in shelters have been homeless for less than six months contradicting the idea that homelessness is a chosen lifestyle. Almost two-thirds of the residents (64%) were using the shelter for the first time.

More than half (51%) are women and children undermining the stereotype that homeless

people are single males.

And one of the most commonly held stereotypes is that homeless people migrate to places where the services and weather are better. Yet once again this year just under 60% of the homeless people surveyed have lived in Ventura County for ten years or more—many for much more. Over 30% have lived in the county for more than 25 years.

These are just the people—families and women with children, longtime Ventura residents who are newly homeless—that we believe are the people most likely to be assisted by the Ventura Homeless Service Center ♦

City Council

Continued From Page 1

the resolution.

The seven sites—six privately owned and one government owned—are in several regions of Ventura. One is near the Ventura County Medical Center. Two are on Telegraph Road in the general vicinity of Ventura College and the remaining four are south of Main Street and west of Telephone Road. The committee believes that any of these sites would be suitable for the center.

There is still a long way to go. Once the property is acquired it will be necessary to prepare the architectural drawings, go through the design review and planning processes, plan check and construction (not to mention the necessity of raising several million dollars).

It is our hope that the center will be in operation by the end of 2005. ♦

Project Understanding Receives Justice Award

Project Understanding has been awarded the 2003 Joyce Yoshioka Award. Given by the Criminal Defense Bar Association, the award is given annually to a nonlawyer individual or organization to recognize efforts to further the cause of justice for indigent persons.

The award is given in the memory of Joyce Yoshioka who was an assistant public defender who died about ten years ago from cancer.

Project Understanding was chosen for the award this year to recognize the efforts of the SARAH Center. The mail and phone message services of the SARAH Center make it possible for homeless persons to keep in contact with their attorneys and therefore have positive access to the justice system.

The award was presented at a dinner on Friday, May 30, 2003. ♦

Priceless

Continued From Page 8

people turned purple and green and became spiked into (to me) strange configurations. The length and style of hair has long been a way for people—particularly young people—to make a statement about who they are. It has also been a way that we have judged each other.

But while some in my generation wore their hair long and unkempt for political or societal reasons, there are some who do so for economic

reasons. These people are judged just as harshly.

I can wear my hair any length I choose because I can afford to have it cut regularly. And whatever length I choose for my hair, I can easily keep it clean because I have ready access to shower facilities.

But people who are homeless and indigent have none of these advantages. So their hair is often long and unkempt and dirty. And the rest of us make judgments about them. Not perhaps about their political beliefs as we would have in the '60s, but about their worth as people. We speak to them less. We avoid eye contact. We let them know, in a myriad of ways that we consider them as vastly inferior to ourselves.

For more than 15 years, the SARAH program at Project Understanding has provided homeless people with a place to keep their hair and bodies and clothes clean. More importantly, we have tried to treat homeless people with the dignity and respect they deserve regardless of how their hair looks.

As we have been reporting for the last several months, we are making good progress towards the creation of a center where homeless people will receive these services as well as the opportunity to have a place to stay while they are beginning the road to recovery.

I wear a beard. I wash it and trim it like I do my hair and don't think much more about it. It is so much a part of me that those around me sometimes aren't even aware of it.

Wouldn't it be nice to live in a place where people's hair is noticeable only when they want it to be? ♦

Does Your Congregation or Group Need a Speaker?

Being the person in charge of securing speakers for a service club or congregational group is sometimes not an easy task. Project Understanding has an important message to get out. Let's help each other.

Project Understanding has speakers ready and willing to speak on a number of topics and to come to any group of any size.

Does your congregation need a guest preacher during a summer vacation? Does your service club need a speaker? Does your church women's group need a program? We can help.

Our executive director, Rick Pearson, is an ordained United Methodist minister and has preached in more than 20 congregations throughout Ventura County. We also have staff and volunteers who can speak on all the various areas of service at Project Understanding.

So whatever your group's interest and need—whatever the size of your group—Project Understanding will be happy to supply you with a speaker who will be both informative and interesting.

For more information or to schedule a speaker, please call Kendra Folsom at 652-1326, extension 30. ♦

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Marcia Wakelee
Tutoring 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 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.

Soroptimists Honor Two Saticoy Tutors

The Ventura Soroptimist Club has honored two Saticoy tutors with its Violet Richardson Award, which is given to young women who volunteer to serve their communities.

Gabriela Halpern and Diana Essex are both Buena High School students who have tutored at the Saticoy Center for the last two years. Each has given a helping hand to several students, working on everything from reading and spelling to fractions to pre-algebra, building positive relationships with their students along the way.

In the essay that was a part of the application for this award, Diana talks about her experiences with her students. She says, "We count to 25, write 'Laura' neatly in cursive, and color in those four bees remaining from a subtraction problem. When the sweat and toil is through, she yanks books from the shelves . . . Together, we invade foreign lands, talk to elephants, and play with pokey puppies. Time permitting, we engage in a rousing round of Candyland and I ask of her day."

This is how Gabriela describes tutoring in her essay. "I don't see tutoring as an 'accomplishment.' I don't feel accomplished when I finish a tutoring session; I feel uplifted. When I see my pupils who are loving and caring, it makes me incredibly happy. When I witness my students improving in their classes, I feel proud of them. And, when my students

have gained a desire to learn and study, I feel ecstatic."

We are blessed to have these wonderful young women as a part of the tutoring program in Saticoy! ♦

Teachers Honor Eunice Koch

The California Teachers Association and the Ventura Unified Education Association have honored Eunice Koch with their Gold Award, which is given to outstanding citizens who have made significant contributions to the cause of public education.

Eunice has been helping children at our Lincoln Tutoring Center for more than ten years. Starting as a tutor, she soon took on the position of site coordinator, responsible for the operation of that tutoring center.

In that capacity, she has recruited and encouraged a wonderful group of tutors, matched them thoughtfully with students in need of help, monitored their progress, filled in when tutors are absent, coordinated with teachers and school administration, and generally done whatever was needed to make things run smoothly. She brings grace, energy and enthusiasm to all these tasks.

Long active at Project Understanding, Eunice has served as a member of our board of directors. We are thankful for Eunice's dedication to the children of Lincoln School. ♦



Kathy Meza's Community Health Work Appreciated

Kathy Meza will be leaving Project Understanding after more than three years as the community health outreach worker. Her contract through the Chronic Disease Prevention/Management Program with Ventura County Public Health has expired.



We appreciate the work that Kathy has done on behalf of the agency. Her main role was to travel throughout the county educating, screening, and giving follow-up care to residents. She traveled more than 100 miles weekly, emphasizing preventive measures to take against diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.

Kathy moves on to the Kidney Center of Santa Paula. She will again be traveling frequently; this time to Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks where she will assist in lab testing. We will miss her infectious smile and sense of humor. All the best, Kathy! ♦

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

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

Individuals

Judy Alexandre
Babette Amir Khan
Robert Anderson & Rose Marie Voelker
Harry & Paula Anderson
Arthur & Dennis Anderson
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**Thank you to the following
 people and groups who
 contributed food and other
 items to our program in April:**

Individuals

Robert Anderson & Rose Marie
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 Larry & Kari Broggin
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 Larry & Carol Dawes
 Catherine Elsenbaumer
 Kendra Folsom
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 Douglas & Jean Jereska
 Sharon Knapp
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 Karen Romney & Keith Lothrop
 Dorothy Schmitt
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 Jill Surmont
 Donald Tillquist
 Irene Torres
 Zera Waggoner
 Leonard & Marsha Weber

Richard Wilmeth

Churches & Organizations

Alliance for the Mentally Ill
 Anacapa Bread Company
 Church of the Foothills
 Community of Christ Church
 Community Presbyterian Church
 First Baptist Church of Ventura
 First Christian Church
 First United Methodist Church of
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Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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Rheto-Rick

Shave and a Hair Cut—Priceless

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

A friend of mine recently started growing a beard while on a camping trip. When he returned from the trip he mentioned to my wife that he couldn't think of anyone in our congregation who wore a beard. When Ellen pointed out to him that I wear a beard, he replied, "Really? I hadn't noticed."

This man has known me for nearly a decade and has never seen me without a beard. My children have never seen me without a beard. In fact, the only time I have been without a beard was the year that I worked as an engineer after graduating from UCLA.

When I was being interviewed for the position at First United Methodist Church that first brought my family to Ventura more than 20 years ago, one of the interviewers asked me, "Why do you wear a

beard?" It was the toughest question in the interview because I had never really thought about it that much. Growing the beard was part of my college experience beginning in the late 1960s. I simply stopped shaving and cutting my hair. While I was one of the few engineering students at UCLA with long hair and a beard, I was certainly not unusual on the campus as a whole. Long hair and beards were the norm on college campuses at the time as you will remember.

However, at home and at church in the San Fernando Valley, it was a different story. My hair and my beard were as much a political statement as a fashion statement. This was, after all, the time of the musical, "Hair." "Long haired" was usually followed by the word "hippy." By the mid-1970s I was married and in seminary. I wore my hair shorter but never lost the beard.

I thought about this over the years as hair fashions changed. I tried to remember my own long hair when the hair of young

See Priceless, Page 3

Highlights

P. 1: City Council agrees to acquire site for Ventura Homeless Service Center.

Help needed to end fiscal year in the black.

Clergy invited to meeting on the Ventura Homeless Service Center.

P. 2: Home improvement auction planned for Oct.

Who are the homeless in Ventura County?

P. 3: Project Understanding receives justice award.

Does your congregation need a speaker?

P. 5: Soroptimists honor two Saticoy tutors.

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