

# PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers  
and supporters of Project  
Understanding

Volume XX No. 3  
(Monthly)

March 2005



## Participate in the CROP Walk and Help End Hunger

■ Walk or support a walker; donate canned food.

By Rick Pearson  
Executive Director

The annual CROP Walk is coming on March 13th. There has been a walk in Ventura every year for more than a quarter of a century so

there is the danger that we begin to take this important event for granted.

But the people who are helped by these funds never take them for granted. The CROP Walk in Ventura raises thousands of

dollars each year for the Project Understanding Focus on Food Emergency Food Pantry. And those thousands of dollars help feed thousands of people right here in Ventura, people who are our neighbors and friends. The Oxnard-Port Hueneme CROP

Walk raises funds that are used for the Bread of Life program through which five congregations have joined together to feed hot meals to hungry people in Oxnard each week.

But the CROP Walks don't just raise money for local programs (as important as these funds are). The funds also go all around the world through the relief efforts of Church World Service (CWS). CWS has received many donations directly for the tsunami relief efforts but our CROP dollars make a difference even here.

This is how Church World Service describes the relationship between CROP Walk funding and the current disaster relief:

"The devastation wrought by the tsunami on December 26 staggers our imagination and burdens our hearts — so much loss of innocent life. Stirred by compassion, millions of people around the world are responding to the suffering. From Girl Scout troops to the United Nations, in ways great and small, individuals, groups, and nations are reaching out to help. Church World Service is grateful to be one vehicle of that heartfelt response.

"The contributions we receive to our tsunami recovery appeal are helping us respond to both the immediate needs and

See CROP Walk Page 3

## Speakers Urge City to Move Forward on Site for Daybreak

Dozens of Project Understanding supporters and six speakers appeared before the Ventura City Council on February 7th and urged the City to move more quickly in fulfilling its three-year promise to acquire a site for the Daybreak Living Center.

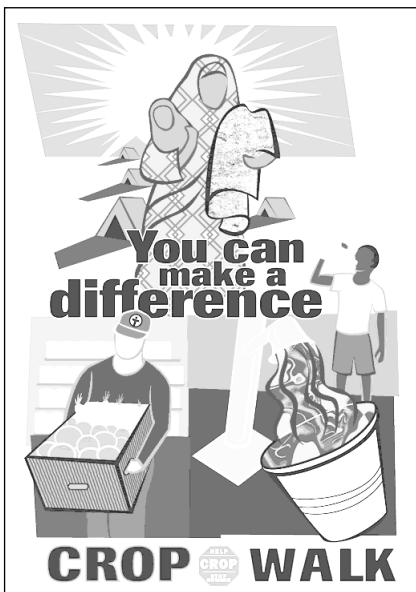
When it is built, the Daybreak Center will provide shelter and services to homeless families and individuals who are beginning the road to return to self-sufficiency.

Ray DiGuilio, former mayor of Ventura, urged the Council to consider "taking the action that is necessary in order to deal with the siting issue and the political turmoil that will almost automatically come no matter where you decide" to site the facility.

Two current members of the Project Understanding board of directors spoke: Dennis Mitchell and immediate past president Judy Alexandre. Dr. Alexandre told the Council, "I know that you have tried. 'Trying' is no longer enough. We need action and we need it now."

Rabbi Lisa Hochberg-

See Daybreak, Page 3



## Mother Finds Success While at Transition House

By Regina Fitz-Gerald  
Housing Case Manager

Judy is a very hard working mom who has set goals for herself to better her life. She has fulfilled one of those goals while living at the Transition House. That goal was to get her medical billing and transcribing certificate. She has already received her medical front office certificate and was working in this field when she came to Transition House.

Judy has not only gotten her certificate in medical billing and transcribing she was top in her class. Her teacher said he could tell time by how punctual she was and her dedication to fulfilling her goals was an inspiration to all her fellow students.

I know you may be thinking, many people work hard and reach their goals, what makes this story so very special? About three years ago Judy was pregnant with her first and only child, which was a great joy for her and her husband.

Then one day her whole life changed. Her husband had been abusing alcohol, which led him to get in trouble with the law. He went to jail for over a year. Judy was alone with none of her family here in the area.

Her husband's family took her in and she had their son Freddie without his father there. Judy kept up high hopes that dad would come home, stay away from the alcohol, and they would begin a new life. She knew she would need to get a job to help the family when her

husband got out of jail. She started school to get her front office certificate. She got a job in her field even before she received that certificate.

It was time for dad to come home. Judy was so happy for their life together to begin. But he soon began drinking again. She came home one night after working all day and going to school in the evening to find him drunk while watching their son. She picked their son up and left the house never to go back. She was homeless. What was she going to do?

She got herself into an emergency shelter and began to look for a permanent residence for herself and her son. While all this was going on she was still working full time and going to school. She found her way to Project Understanding's Transition House program.

Many things have changed for Judy this past year. She has received her certificate. She was paying \$700 to \$900 a month in childcare and that has been lowered to a minimal fee through Child Development Resources. She has been accepted into the PACE program at Oxnard College to receive her A.A. in business. She has a great opportunity to be instrumental in opening a new billing office for several doctors in the county next month with an increase in pay, medical benefits and retirement plan. This new job will give her the freedom to have a better life for herself and her son.

Judy's favorite line is, "Little by little, and in God's time." I know with these words Judy will continue to do many great things for herself and her family. ♦

## Contagious Happiness

By Marcia Wakelee  
Tutoring Coordinator

At Lincoln Elementary School, our tutors go into the student's classroom right after school. A classroom may have several tutoring pairs working together while the teacher completes his or her daily duties. Tutor Norm Weitzel received this note from Lincoln teacher Cindy Williams.

Dear Norm,

You sure know how to cheer up a room. Not just a room, but all of the people around you have smiles. You are wonderful. Thank you for your contagious happiness!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more of us had a case of "Contagious Happiness"? ♦

## Counting

Continued From Page 8

person's herculean efforts have gone unmentioned up to now in these pages is due mostly to the fact that this faithful volunteer happens to be married to me. I was afraid that to thank my wife publically for volunteering at the agency I serve might seem self-serving. But even a husband cannot fail to appreciate 15 years of faithful service.

So thank you, Ellen, for all the creativity, toil and care you have put into the Project Understanding News during the past 15 years. And for all the issues yet to come. ♦



## CROP Walk

Continued From Page 1

the long-term recovery of these shattered communities. It is important to remember, however, that the reason CWS was able to make such a swift and effective response to this disaster (within hours) is in large part because of the ongoing support raised by communities across this nation through CROP Walks.

“CROP Walks form the foundation for the work of Church World Service — without them we would not be in a position to respond. Thanks to that support we had longstanding programs in the area (Indonesia, Pakistan, and Laos) with staff trained in emergency response and well-established relationships with partner agencies across the region. Thanks

to CROP Walks we also had emergency medical supplies, blankets, kits and other resources prepositioned in Asia, ready at a moment’s notice.”

**Your donated foods will be matched dollar for cans by the Alan Feinstein Foundation.**

This year our Ventura Walk will have a new way to help hungry people. Our CROP Walks have been offered matching dollar for cans! All box and canned food donations that are brought in for the CROP Walk, will be matched up with a dollar contribution by the Alan Feinstein Foundation. So the Ventura CROP Walk Committee is encouraging walkers to bring in their donations on the day of the walk. Nonwalkers can also bring food. These donations will be delivered to Project Understanding’s Food Pantry. ♦

## Daybreak

Continued From Page 1

Miller, speaking as a representative of Ventura-area clergy stated, “Please understand that the issue that stands before you is for people that you don’t necessarily see and that makes it all the more dire. They are not the people that you see on the streets. They are the people that we see with empty hearts sitting in our pews week after week. I encourage you to continue to be diligent.”

Two residents of Project Understanding’s Transition House and executive director Rick Pearson also spoke.

In response to all the speakers, City Manager Rick Cole made a statement that detailed the state of negotiations on three

potential sites and concluded, “The Council has made it very clear to me and to the staff and to the city attorney that we need to acquire one of those [three] sites. I hope to have good news. And when we do that will come before the community in public open session in which all the points, pro and con, can be debated.

“I hope that debate will come soon and I hope even more so that the groundbreaking will come soon . . . We are committed to do that and the Council has been very clear with me . . . that we are going to take whatever it takes to get this done.”

Our deep thanks to all those who came out in support of Daybreak. As the City Manager said, “We hope to have good news soon.” ♦

## Support Neal Andrews’ Appeal to Invite Gov. to Ventura

Councilmember Neal Andrews has been a champion for homeless issues during his entire time on the Ventura City Council. He chaired the Site Selection Committee that established the criteria for siting the Daybreak Living Center and he was instrumental in the recent community dialogs concerning the people living in the Ventura River area.

Now he has invited Governor Schwarzenegger to participate in an event that can be used to raise private funds to assist in the effort to provide permanent solutions for homelessness in Ventura County. So far the governor has not said, “Yes.”

Mr. Andrews is asking people to communicate with the governor and encourage him to agree. This is Neal’s request — “All you need to say in your message is: ‘Please accept Neal Andrews’ invitation!’ That’s it. That will do the job. You can add anything else you like, but that is the core of the message that I need you to deliver for me.”

If you want to communicate with Governor Schwarzenegger, here is the contact information:

**Write to:**

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger  
State Capitol Building  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Phone:** (916) 445-2841

**Fax:** (916) 445-4633

**E-Mail:**

[governor@governor.ca.gov](mailto:governor@governor.ca.gov) ♦



Councilmember  
Neal Andrews

## Board of Directors



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SARAH Coordinator

**Kay Hoyt**

Reception Center Coordinator

**Lisa Lee**

Pantry Coordinator

**Marcia Wakelee**

Tutoring Coordinator

**Shelley Wilmeth**

Clerical Support

## Our Mission and Programs

### Mission

**P**roject 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.

*“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*

## County Schools Credit Union Becomes Sponsor of Festival of Hobbies

The Project Understanding Annual Festival of Hobbies has become the County Schools Federal Credit Union Festival of Hobbies thanks to a generous gift from the Credit Union.

The County Schools Federal Credit Union Festival of Hobbies is scheduled for Saturday, July 9, 2005, at the Anacapa Middle School at Mills and Telegraph roads in Ventura.

Since January 1960, County Schools Federal Credit Union (CSFCU) has been chartered by the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) to provide financial services to the faculty, staff, students, and their immediate family members from all public and private schools in Ventura County.

This commitment to education makes CSFCU a natural fit with the Festival of Hobbies which will largely benefit the Project Understanding Tutoring program.

As we welcome the County Schools Federal Credit Union as our title sponsor, we still invite other businesses and organizations to become sponsors of the event at our other levels:

- Collector (\$1000 to \$4999)
- Crafter (\$500 to \$999)
- Carver (\$250 to \$499)
- Carpenter (\$100 to \$249)

If interested in participating as a sponsor or for more information, contact Rick Pearson at 652-1326. ♦

## Renee Hall Ends Long Tenure in SARAH Center, Jim Grimes Named New Coordinator

Last month we announced with sadness the resignation of Shari Kempton, longtime co-coordinator of the SARAH Center at Project Understanding.

While we were extremely sad to see Shari go, it allowed us to move to a single coordinator for the SARAH Center. It was our hope and desire that

that coordinator would be Renee Hall who has been the other co-coordinator of the center since 1992.



After much prayerful thought, Renee decided that to accept the full coordinator position at this time would require too much rearranging of other commitments in her life and schedule and has decided to resign as well.

Shari and Renee have been a fixture in the lives of homeless people for more than a dozen years in the SARAH Center. They provided a familiar face and warm welcome to the hundreds of people who use the showers, laundry and other services that the center provides.

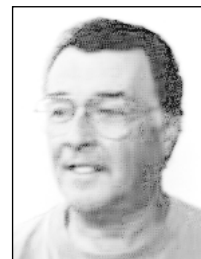
Renee has carried out her duties with compassion and respect. She brought a joy and love to the position that grew out of her deep Christian faith

and that faith is evident in her every word and action.

Renee, thank you for your years of dedicated service. You will be deeply missed.

### Welcome to Jim Grimes as the new SARAH coordinator.

With the departure of Renee and Shari, we are pleased to be able to announce the appointment



of Jim Grimes to the position of SARAH coordinator.

Jim first came to Project Understanding in the summer of 2001 as the assistant in the Focus on Food Emergency Pantry. He came with the assistance of the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation's (MAOF) Senior Aides Program. Joe Anguiano, the pantry coordinator at the time, found Jim to be hardworking and a God loving man and he was very glad to have his help.

Near the end of his stint with the Senior Aides Program, Jim moved from the Pantry to SARAH and has continued to volunteer in SARAH after the funding through MAOF ran out. This service means that Jim knows the people who come into the center and they know him. He is also well familiar with the operation of the center. All this will mean an almost seamless transition during this staff change.

Jim came to Ventura 30 years ago from New York and still loves it here. He especially likes the beach and bicycling.

Welcome to the staff (again), Jim. ♦

## 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 January.**

### Individuals

Wendell & Denise Allen  
Babette Amirkhan  
Robert Anderson & Rose Marie Voelker  
Ruben & Terrie Andrade  
Roy & Mary Lou Ash  
Patricia Barrett  
Loye Barton  
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Ted Rubin  
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Joe & Arline Sincoff  
Lawrence & Martha Smith  
Eugene & Patricia West

# Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

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Amgen Foundation  
 Cars 4 Causes  
 College United Methodist Church  
 Community Bible Church of Ventura County  
 County of Ventura  
 Eastminster Presbyterian Church  
 Edison International  
 First Assembly of God of Ventura  
 First Baptist Church of Ojai  
 First United Methodist Church of Ventura  
 Grace Lutheran Church  
 Horizon Foursquare Church  
 No Room at the Inn  
 Presbytery of Santa Barbara, Peacemaking Sub Committee  
 Pythian Sisters  
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Couples Circle  
 Trinity Lutheran Church, Women of the ELCA  
 United Way  
 United Way, Other, United Way of Central Maryland  
 United Way, Other, United Way of Los Angeles County  
 United Way, Other, United Way/ Edison International

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

## Individuals

Judy Alexandre  
 Erwin & Ruth Bachhoffer  
 Sheila Brady  
 Richard Brennan  
 Marilyn Childs  
 Laura Covault  
 Leann Davis  
 Dorothy & Monte Elchoness

Norma Emery  
 Pat Glazer  
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 Gale & Bette Hartman  
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 Kaaren Valdez  
 Leonard & Marsha Weber  
 Norm & Lynn Weitzel  
 Gordon & June Welsh  
 Paul & Lucinda Wilhelmsen  
 Richard Wilmeth

## Churches & Organizations

Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
 Anacapa Bread Company  
 College United Methodist Church  
 Community Presbyterian Church  
 E. P. Foster Elementary School  
 First Baptist Church of Ventura  
 First Christian Church  
 First United Methodist Church of Ventura  
 First United Methodist Church of Ventura, Mariposa Fellowship  
 FOOD Share  
 Grace Lutheran Church  
 Kiwanis Club of Downtown Ventura  
 Mission Uniform & Linen Service  
 National Charity League  
 Olivet Baptist Church

Pythian Sisters  
 Sacred Heart Catholic Church  
 San Buenaventura Women's Club  
 Soroptimist International of Ventura  
 Temple Beth Torah  
 Trader Joe's  
 Trinity Lutheran Church  
 Unitarian Universalist Church  
 Ventura Missionary Church  
 Vons Grocery, Harbor Blvd.  
 Vons Grocery, Telegraph Rd.  
 Vons Grocery, Thompson Blvd.  
 Women of Vision

## Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

## Donate Your Car



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Rheto-Rick

## Fifteen Years and Counting

By Rick Pearson  
Executive Director

Those of you who pay attention to such things may have noticed that we are in Volume XX of the Project Understanding News. Volume I covers the year 1986. That is the year that Pat Driskell became executive director of Project Understanding.

During Pat's first few weeks on the job, he saw Sue Sturtevant cutting and pasting some typed pages to create a newsletter that announced Pat's arrival. He calmly announced that the newsletter would become a monthly publication.

Sue nearly fainted. When they had done a newsletter in the past, it had taken them weeks to write, edit and type, then literally cut and paste it together with scissors and glue. A monthly newsletter seemed out of the question.

But Pat found volunteers

with some computer skills and made his wish a reality.

There were some problems in those early years. When stories were edited on the computer sometimes part of the article would get pushed off the page and never be seen again. And, while the content was good, the layout was sometimes not very appealing to the eye. But the newsletter got out each month.

Then in Volume V, No. 3 a new name appeared on the thank you page as the layout person. As the months moved on the appearance of the newsletter changed and improved. In addition to being informative, the newsletter became attractive and easier to read.

Producing this newsletter is a big job. It takes an entire weekend each month. Yet that same volunteer continues to do it each month. This month marks 15 years — 180 lost weekends spent laying out the Project Understanding News.

This layout person is not quitting, but 15 years seemed like a logical time for some public appreciation. That this

See Counting, Page 2

## Highlights

**P. 1:** Participate in the CROP Walk and help end hunger.

Speakers urge City to move forward on site for the Daybreak Living Center.

**P. 2:** Mother finds success while at Transition House.

Contagious happiness.

**P. 3:** Support Neal Andrews' appeal to invite Governor to Ventura.

**P. 5:** County Schools Credit Union becomes sponsor of Festival of Hobbies.

Renee Hall ends long tenure in SARAH Center; Jim Grimes is named the new coordinator.



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