

# PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers  
and supporters of Project  
Understanding

Volume XXI No. 3  
(Monthly)

March 2006



## Join In CROP Walk on Mar. 12

**H**ow many steps do you have to take in your home to get a drink of water?

How many steps do you have to take in your kitchen to get water for cooking or cleaning?

In the first talking movie in 1927, Al Jolson got down on one knee and sang these words, "I'd walk a million miles for one of your smiles." Would you

walk a million miles for a glass of water? How about a million kilometers? Maybe a million centimeters?

On Sunday, March 12, hundreds of people in Ventura County will walk a million centimeters to raise money and awareness for the millions of people who must walk many miles each day just to secure clean water. A million centimeters is ten kilometers or a little over six miles. It is a very pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon in Ventura County but not a very pleasant way to get water for your family.

The toilets in many of our homes require three and a half gallons of water to flush. Imagine that you had to walk three or four miles carrying that

See CROP, Page 2

## High Rents Force Hardworking People Out

By Regina Fitz-Gerald  
Housing Case Manager

**T**he high cost of rentals in Ventura County means that many hardworking people find themselves faced with the ominous possibility of being evicted from their homes. Each day some of them find their way to Project Understanding.

Many families who came in for rental assistance were helped in other ways, including landlord negotiations, budget information, utility assistance, and referrals to other organizations. Many people learned that with the support and guidance of our staff, they have the ability to solve many of their problems. And many received the financial assistance to remain in their home.

### Moving Out of Homelessness

Some times we meet a homeless family that has been working very hard to move out of homelessness. With great effort they come close to making this dream come true. I met such a family late this past year.

The mother, father and son where living in their car and had

See High Rents, Page 2



### Ventura County CROP Walks Sunday, March 12

For information or  
to sign up for a walk  
contact:

Ventura Walk  
(Janine Rands)  
676-1814

Oxnard/Port  
Hueneme Walk  
(Cloene Marson)  
983-8111

## High Rents

### Continued From Page 1

been for about six months. The dad lost his job, which put the family on the street and into their car. He started looking for work immediately after losing his job. It took a month or so before he found a job. Mom went to work shortly after dad started his job. She was working two part-time jobs within a couple of weeks after dad started his job. They saved and stayed in their car. When they thought they had enough money saved up to start looking for a place, I referred them to a local landlord who was willing to let them rent, but because of their credit history he wanted a double deposit. This meant they did not have the money to move in.

They asked Project Understanding for help. I was able to help them get into this new place. They were so happy to be able to provide their son with a home and be in it for the Christmas holidays. They had a great Christmas because of the generosity of the programs that are here for families in need at Christmas.

They still do not have much in their apartment in the way of furnishings. We have gotten a few things to help. Their son has a bed and a chest of drawers, there are dishes for the kitchen and a couple of pots and pans, some silverware and a refrigerator. We are still looking for a bed for Mom and Dad, a table and chairs for the kitchen and maybe a couch they can sit on. If anyone has any of these items, please call me at Project Understanding and I will make sure they receive any donations for them.

As you can see when the community comes together a family can be successful in moving out of homelessness and moving into a place of their own. Thank you goes out to everyone who has helped with this family and others like them.

The funding sources for Project Understanding's Eviction Prevention and Rental Assistance Program are the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Shelter Grant Program, and a fund from Eastminster Presbyterian Church.

### Eastminster Fund Helps

The fund from Eastminster Presbyterian Church helps persons who do not fit the guidelines from the other rental assistance funds here at Project Understanding.

One such case was a woman who had become disabled and was living in a situation that was not healthy for herself or her adult daughter. She was on a limited income and the daughter was unable to work at this time due to her recovery program from drug addiction. The mother found a safe place for her and her daughter at a rate she could afford. She needed a little help with the rent and came to Project Understanding. With money from the Eastminster account I was able to help with the first month's rent. The mother is going to school full-time hoping to be able to get back into the work force and maybe provide a better living arrangement for her and her daughter.

The daughter is involved in outpatient rehabilitation and is very successful. She hopes to be

able to get some training and return to a job to help her mom and herself to have a better home.

If this fund from Eastminster were not here they still would have been living in the bad environment to this day. They are both safe and able to concentrate on their future and become winners in our community. Thank you, Eastminster Presbyterian Church, for helping this family be successful. ♦

## CROP

### Continued From Page 1

water. Three and a half gallons of water weigh about 30 pounds. And that is just one flush!

One of the many uses for the money raised through CROP Walks is to supply low-cost, low-maintenance water wells so that people do not have to spend hours each day carrying heavy loads of water for their families.

A quarter of the funds raised stay right here in the county. They help support agencies like Project Understanding's Focus on Food Pantry in their efforts against hunger here in our midst. The rest goes to world relief efforts through international groups like Church World Service.

Will you consider being a walker this year? If not, will you consider supporting a walker this year? The contact information for the Ventura and Oxnard/Port Hueneme walks is printed in a box on page 1. Last year the Ventura walk raised over \$27,000. Let's beat that this year. ♦

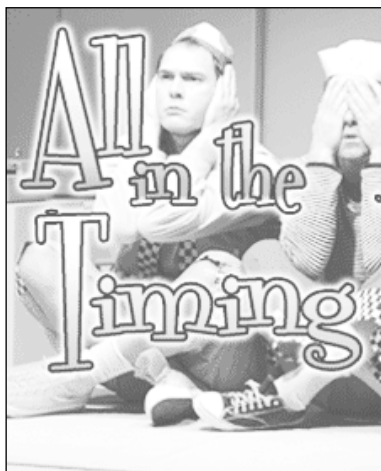
## All in the Timing April 30 Benefit Performance

A second Project Understanding benefit performance for this season has been scheduled at the Rubicon Theatre. The performance is set for 6 p.m. on Sunday, April 30, and the show that evening will be *All in the Timing*.

This benefit performance is made possible by a very generous gift from Grossman Imaging Center, Dr. Irwin Grossman, medical director. Grossman Imaging Center also sponsored the benefit performance of *Tuesdays with Morrie* last year. We are deeply appreciative of their ongoing support.

The show is described this way:

Smart, sophisticated and wildly funny, *All in the Timing*



is a series of wacky and wonderful vignettes which explore, in Ives' inimitable style, the marvels and mysteries of modern life. Five talented comic actors with impeccable timing offer affectionate insights into such subjects as the "dos and don'ts" of dating, missed and made connections, the need for

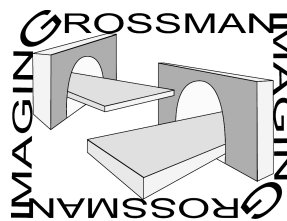
universal language, the death of Trotsky, Philip Glass (ordering a loaf of bread), and what to do in [a] Philadelphia; while also answering the all-important time-honored question: could three chimps with typewriters eventually come up with Hamlet?

*All in the Timing* is written by David Ives and directed by Robert Grande-Weiss. Members of the cast include Ben Bottoms, Michael Medico, Nancy Nufer, Carolyn Palmer and Paul Welterlen.

The Rubicon Theatre has developed a reputation for presenting first-rate theatrical productions and also for giving back to the community. This will be the third time that the Rubicon Theatre has teamed with Project Understanding to stage a benefit performance.

This has been an exciting partnership.

The benefit promises to be an interesting and entertaining evening — a way to enjoy your-



**Thank you to Grossman Imaging Center for sponsoring this event.**

self and benefit Project Understanding at the same time.

Please use the ticket form on this page or call Debbie Beers at 652-1326, extension 826, for more information. ♦

### All in the Timing Benefit Performance

Sunday, April 30, 2006

At the Rubicon Theatre, Ventura

Ticket orders received after \_\_\_\_\_  
will be available for pick-up at the door.

- Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ ticket(s) for the Benefit Performance (\$50 per ticket).
- Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ VIP ticket(s) for the Benefit Performance (\$75 per ticket).

Check enclosed for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please make checks payable to Project Understanding.)

## Board of Directors



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Receptionist

*“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 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.

#### 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.

## Two Recent Developments for Daybreak

There have been two significant developments in recent weeks in the efforts towards the creation of the Daybreak Living Center. These include a change in the developer for the companion housing project for artists and a change in the scope of the type of housing offered through Daybreak itself.

Faithful readers of this newsletter know that Project Understanding has been attempting for a number of years to create a facility in Ventura that will assist homeless families and individuals to return to self-sufficiency. For the past year, we have partnered with Artspace, Inc. and the City of Ventura on a project called the WAV which would incorporate both the Daybreak Center and 50 units of live-work space for low-income artists and their families.

During the past month, Artspace, Inc. and the City have decided to sever their relationship, and the City has agreed to hire a new developer. This developer is PLACE (Project Linking Art, Community and the Environment), a new entity created by a former Artspace staff member, Chris Velasco.

While Project Understanding has considered itself a partner with both Artspace and the City, this decision was strictly between Artspace and the City.

However, we stand ready to

work with both the City and PLACE towards the completion of this project. The most immediate result of this development is that the overall time line for the project will be delayed about a year with groundbreaking anticipated for March 2007.

In the course of discussions with Mr. Velasco and the

City, an idea arose that would have direct implications for the design and operation of the Daybreak portion of the project.

The Daybreak Living Center, as it was envisioned, was to be an approximately 15,000-sq.-ft., short-term transitional living center, where families and individuals could take the first steps from homelessness to self-sufficiency.

While it is still the primary aim of the center to move people from homelessness to self-sufficiency, the Project Understanding board of directors, with the advice of the Daybreak Advisory Committee, has decided to structure the center as supportive housing, rather than transitional housing.

The concept of supportive housing is to place people directly into housing with the necessary support services to increase the likelihood that they will be successful. These support services are not appreciatively different than the support services that would be offered in transitional housing, but the time limit on occupancy that is a basic part of transitional housing would be eliminated. Instead, the families and

individuals would be encouraged to move towards self-sufficiency as quickly as possible without an artificial time line.

This change also makes the project potentially eligible for a different funding source which would help the financing of the Daybreak Center and possibly the overall project as well.

These are both significant changes in development of the Daybreak Living Center. They will alter the time line for the completion of the project. But nothing has changed that will alter the underlying goal of our efforts — to create a place where homeless people in the City of Ventura can begin to move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. ♦

## Immigrants

### Continued From Page 8

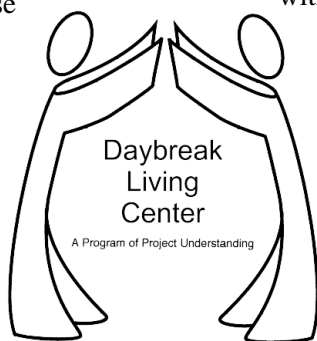
together both because they were seeking a touch of the homeland they had left and because their neighbors in this new land did not want them next door.

Now our states are trying to implement the Real ID Act that Congress passed last spring. The idea is to foil terrorists by giving everyone a document with all their personal information encoded on it. This document is intended to secure our freedoms.

Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Archbishop in the Anglican Church, wrote this about the carrying of such documents:

*“When I was a boy in South Africa, thousands of blacks were arrested daily under the iniquitous pass-law system,*

See Immigrants, Page 7



## 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

Judy Alexandre  
George Appel  
Roy & Mary Lou Ash  
Lila Atkisson  
Russell & Elvera Baccus  
Marion Baranowski  
Loye Barton  
Donna Boeck  
Howard & Linda Bolinger  
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Jacqueline Manley  
Alphonse & Jan Marra  
John & Frances Marshall  
Marilyn McFadden  
Tom & Florence McNally  
Luceille Merkel  
Richard & Loueen Miller  
Dennis & Deirdre Mitchell  
Alfred Mottola  
Gail Narkevic  
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Robert & Virginia Unruhe  
Ruberda Vigen  
Blanche Viles  
Bernard Visser  
Daniel & Joanne Wakelee  
Mary Jane Wallace  
Ted & Evelyn Whitacre

In memory of:

Jean Jareska

Given by:

Ronald Sado

Janice Weeks

Joyce & Jerry Bjorklund

Clarice Kulper

E. Mathis & Tomi Murphy

Michael O'Brien

Herb & Diane Suskin

In honor of:

Jeff Rubke

Given by:

Evelyn Adams

## Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

In memory of:

Madeline Lower

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Jymmye Hitch-Banhart

In memory of:

Richard Miyasaka

Given by:

Pamela Chan

In honor of:

Judy Vielbig's Birthday

Given by:

The Friday Group

### Churches & Organizations

Church of Religious Science

Community Bible Church of

Ventura County

Connexus Energy

County of Ventura

Embrace Wellness

First Assembly of God of

Ventura

First Presbyterian Church of

Oxnard

First United Methodist Church

of Ventura

Horizon Foursquare Church

Live Oak Christian Fellowship

No Room at the Inn

Ojai Presbyterian Church

Presbytery of Santa Barbara

Pythian Sisters

St. Paul's Episcopal Church of

Ventura

Temple Beth Torah, Temple

Members

Trinity Lutheran Church,

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United Methodist Church,

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Westminster Presbyterian

Church

Zanzillas Yoga

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

### Individuals

Robert & Kenmere Davidson

Lorelle Dawes

Mark Dumais

Les Goldberg

Douglas & Jean Jereska

Alphonse & Jan Marra

Louis Sartori

George & Eleanor Tillquist

### Churches & Organizations

Commission on Human

Concerns

First Baptist Church of Ventura

Grace Lutheran Church

Kentucky Fried Chicken

Lighthouse Christian

Fellowship

Live Oak Christian Fellowship

National Charity League

Peet's Coffee House

Starbucks

The Bridge

Trader Joe's

Unitarian Universalist Church

Ventura Housing Authority

Von's Grocery, Harbor Blvd.

Von's Grocery, Telegraph Rd.

Von's Grocery Thompson Blvd.

### Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

## Immigrants

Continued From Page 5

*which severely curtailed our freedom of movement. As a black person over the age of 16 you had to carry a pass. It was an offense not to have it on your person when a police officer accosted you and demanded to see it. I remember vividly, when I would accompany my schoolteacher father to town, how sorry I felt for him when he was almost invariably stopped. Now there was something funny for you: Because my father was an educated man, he qualified for what was called an exemption. Ordinary pass laws did not apply to him in that he had the privilege denied to other blacks of being able to purchase the white man's liquor without running the risk of being arrested. But for the police to know he was exempted, he had to carry his superior document. His exemption, therefore, did not spare him the humiliation of being stopped and asked peremptorily and rudely to produce it in the street. This kind of treatment gnawed away at your very vitals."*

I have never been to New York City and I do not, to my knowledge, know anyone personally who perished in the World Trade Center towers. So some might say that I was not affected personally by that tragedy. If I had been, they say, I would be willing to give up some freedom to ensure that "foreigners" can never do that again. I don't know if that is true. But I do know that we were all once foreigners in this land. And I don't want to feel like a foreigner again. ♦



Rheto-Rick

## A Nation of Immigrants

By Rick Pearson  
Executive Director

My family will soon recognize the 100th anniversary of my grandparents' wedding. They were married in Chicago on April 30, 1906. Although they met and married in Chicago, they were both born in Sweden late in the 19th century. My grandfather, Carl Pearson (or Persson as it was in Sweden), came to this country as a young man just after the turn of the last century. My grandmother, Olga, came as a child with her family some time earlier.

Carl learned English and they spoke English in their home but they lived in a Swedish neighborhood in Chicago. They attended a Swedish church and shopped in stores where Swedish was spoken.

Carl and Olga had been married for nearly 50 years

when I was born so I only knew them in their later years. Carl died when I was eight but Olga lived with my family for 11 years in her 80s and 90s.

But I have had more reasons to reflect on my grandparents' life than the approaching centennial of their wedding. I know firsthand the story of immigrants to this country. When I was growing up in the 1950s I understood that when my teachers spoke of a nation of immigrants she was speaking of me. When I read the words of Emma Lazarus, "*Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*" she was speaking to my family. My grandfather came to this country on a ship called *Island* and sailed past the statue that bears those words just two weeks after Independence Day in 1902. He began a new life in a new century.

Not everyone shared Emma Lazarus' sentiments. Wave after wave of immigrants huddled

See **Immigrants**, Page 5

## Highlights

**P. 1:** Join in the CROP Walk on Sunday, March 12.

High rents force hardworking people out.

**P. 3:** *All in the Timing* April 30 benefit performance at the Rubicon Theatre.

**P. 5:** New developments have occurred in the Daybreak Living Center.



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Project Understanding at San Buenaventura  
43 E. Vince Street  
P.O. Box 25460  
Ventura, CA 93002-2280  
(805) 652-1326  
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