

# PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers  
and supporters of  
Project Understanding



Volume XXV No. 5  
(Monthly)

May 2010

## What Is He Up To?

By Rob Orth  
Executive Director

**H**ave you ever asked yourself the question, “How did I get here?” I have asked myself that question frequently as my life has certainly taken some interesting turns, some good, others not so much. But even in the challenging turns, when I slow down and take a look at the process, where I have been and where I am right now, I can then see a pathway revealed, one I could not see until I had actually walked it. God is funny that way.



Project Understanding welcomes Rob Orth as its new executive director.

We are called to step out of our comfort zones and walk humbly but courageously with Him, moving forward.

Upon the printing of this newsletter, I will have been in the “saddle” for about two weeks. I can look back over the last year or so and see how things began lining up for me to be in this position. Little things here and there that, left standing alone, didn’t mean much. But putting all the puzzle pieces together, a picture has emerged of today, where I am at right

now. However, the picture is not complete, it never is. There is the future we are all walking into.

Just as God has prepared me for this new position, He is doing the same for our outgoing executive director, Rick. There is a path for him which will open up all sorts of new horizons. It will be interesting to see how Rick’s puzzle picture develops.

God moving a couple of nonprofit directors around doesn’t necessarily seem like a big deal but, He is always up to greater purposes: parting the Red Sea, Noah building a ginormous ark, Jesus being raised from the dead all come to mind. If you read the biblical accounts of these events, a great many things had to line up before they came to pass.

Where am I going with this? We live in some very challenging times — jobs and homes are being lost, pretty much everyone is being stretched and stressed. What is God up to? Could it be He is trying to get our attention? If so, why? Do I have answers? Not really, but I do have my opinions and I will share them in future newsletters.

I look forward to working with the wonderful team at Project Understanding and their community partners as we engage the many challenges facing us all. ♦

## We Welcome Rob Orth

**P**roject Understanding is pleased to announce the appointment of its new executive director, Rob Orth. Mr. Orth was selected following an extensive and thorough executive search process.

“As a local nonprofit serving families and individuals in distress, Project Understanding required a combination of vision, compassion, community connection and management expertise in its leader,” said Board president Judy Alexandre. “Rob has just this combination. His wealth of hands-on community service experience and ability to create collaborative efforts with the faith groups, volunteers, agencies and government will be valued assets in our ongoing efforts to address the social service challenges our county faces.”

Orth’s highly diversified career portfolio includes work in the private sector and most recently, he served as executive director of ACTION Foundation, a faith-based agency providing social service assistance to individuals, families, and homeless in Ventura County. “I was drawn to Project Understanding because of their commitment to transforming lives, lasting community

See Rob Orth on P. 5

# Snapshots From the April 22 Farewell Celebration for Rick Pearson



**Top left picture:** Rick Pearson (lf) and Neal Andrews, Ventura City Councilmember.



**Top right picture:** Joe Anguiano, former Food Pantry coordinator.

**Center left picture:** Rick Pearson (lf) and Carl Morehouse, Ventura City Councilmember.

**Center right picture:** Sandy and Rev. Al Gorsline (lf & ctr) and Judy Alexandre, Board president.

**Bottom left picture:** Neal Andrews (lf); Rob Orth, new executive director of Project Understanding; Lauri Kail, Board member (3rd from lf); and Nancy Barna, Board member (rt).

**Bottom right picture:** Judy and Dan Dugan.





Mindy Johnson, immediate past Board president, and the Project Understanding Board announce Rick Pearson's farewell gifts at his farewell celebration held on April 22. From left: Dorothy Prairie, Dave Schulze, Rick Pearson, Mindy Johnson, Lauri Kail, Judy Alexandre, Frank Maggio, Karen Campbell, John Dickerson, Jim Ayars, and Nancy Barna.

## PU Celebrates Rick Pearson's 20-Year Tenure

More than 150 people gathered at the Wedgewood Center to celebrate Rick Pearson's twenty years as executive director. Guests included present and former staff and Board members, volunteers, donors, and friends.

Immediate past president Mindy Johnson was the MC for the event and speakers included Doug Green, Rick's friend and the consultant who led the Board of Directors in selecting the new executive director, and Rev. Charles Simmons, Rick's former pastor and a Project Understanding volunteer.

Commendations from both the City and County of Ventura were presented and the Project Understanding Board of Directors announced that they are conferring on Rick the title *executive director emeritus* and are renaming the SHORE program (on which Rick worked so long) as the Rick Pearson SHORE Program.

In his response, Rick thanked the Board and guests and expressed that he was deeply touched by the naming of the program in his honor. ♦

## Donations Given in Honor of Rick Pearson

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### Special Thanks

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Mindy Johnson

Nancy Barna

Jim Ayars

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Wedgewood Center



On April 20, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors presented Rick Pearson with a commendation for his service in the community. Pictured from left to right are Project Understanding Board member Lauri Kail and Mindy Johnson (immediate past president), Ellen Pearson (Rick's wife), Rick Pearson, Wallace Pearson (Rick's father), and Supervisor Steve Bennett.



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**Craig Shaw**  
SARAH Coordinator

**Rick Pearson**  
Executive Director Emeritus

*“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

**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 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.

#### The Rick Pearson SHORE Program

#### (Supportive Housing Opportunities in a Residential Environment)

Project Understanding provides fifteen units of permanent supportive housing for formerly homeless people in the WAV Project in downtown Ventura.

#### The Bread of Life

Five congregations are working together to prepare and serve meals to hungry people in Oxnard each week.



## Rob Orth

Continued from P. 1

involvement, and catalytic programs,” said Orth. “The mission, the philosophy and the values of the organization are an inspiration and entirely compatible with my personal vision and direction.”

“I look forward to working with our board of directors, our talented staff, dedicated volunteers and community partners across the county,” added Orth.

Orth has worked with a cross section of public and private sector entities to forge lasting partnerships on behalf of individuals and families who are in various forms of crisis. His nonprofit career has been dedicated to advancing the cause of people with special needs, to creating programs and services that promote stability and hope in lives that have been devastated by homelessness, mental illness, job loss and many other life challenges.

Please join us in welcoming Rob into our midst. ♦

## Sea-to-Summit Time Again

The 37th annual Sea-to-Summit is scheduled for Saturday, May 15. It is a grueling 85-mile ride with a total climb of 8,000 feet in elevation.

And once again, Norm Hudson will be riding for Project Understanding. Norm has ridden in more than 25 of the previous 36 rides and has raised more than \$20,000 for us over just the last ten years.

You can help make Norm’s day more satisfying for him and more rewarding to us by pledging your financial support to Norm and his ride. ♦

## Prayer

Continued from P. 8

could still remember from their childhood. Poems that were more likely to be quoted in small snippets rather than in long passages. For example, when I was a child and we were late in leaving to go somewhere, my mother would often say, “The time has come, the walrus said . . .” It was a long time before I was aware that the line was really from the poem, *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Or when my father had his own words thrown back at him either in jest or in anger, he would invariably say, “If you can stand to hear the words you’ve spoken, twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,” from Rudyard Kipling’s poem, *If*. It was only on rare occasions that he would recite long portions of the poem — usually just to prove that he could.

It has been a long time since I consciously memorized anything. Oh, I get teased for knowing all the words to many songs, both sacred hymns and Broadway show tunes, but I did not set out to memorize them. I simply learned them from long and frequent repetition.

My wife, Ellen, on the other hand, has recently decided to memorize things. She has taken to walking to work in the morning. The two and a half mile distance gives her an uninterrupted hour of time to herself and, she is using that time to commit to memory words that she finds memorable or inspiring. And one of the first things she chose to memorize was a short prayer written by Alan Paton. Paton is the South African who wrote the novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

In 1968, Paton published *Instrument of Thy Peace*, a small volume of short meditations based on the words of the Prayer of Saint Francis. Each meditation ends with a short prayer. The meditation on the opening line — *Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace* — ends with these words (which are the ones that Ellen has committed to memory):

*O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the need of others, open my ears that I may hear their cries, open my heart so that they need not be without succour, let me be not afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong, nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich. Show me where love and hope and faith are needed, and use me to bring them to those places. And so open my eyes and my ears that I may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for Thee.*

Without being able to put it so succinctly, this has been my prayer each day of the last twenty years. It continues to be my prayer as I leave a position that it has been my honor and my joy to hold during that time.

And it is my prayer that this will be the prayer of Project Understanding — its volunteers and staff and supporters — for many years to come.

In the aforementioned Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln concluded with these words, “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.”

I don’t expect you to commit any of my words to memory. But if you will join me in living out the words of Alan Paton’s prayer, the world will not forget what we do. And that will be memorable. ♦



## 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 March:**

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**Thank you to the following people and groups who contributed food and other items to our program in March:**

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Gary Lundquist  
Frank & Dianne Maggio  
Samuel & Barbara Marsh  
Richard & Ellen Pearson  
Frances Slater

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Community of Christ Church  
Community Presbyterian Church  
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Pizza Hut  
San Buenaventura Women's Club  
The Crocadolies  
Trader Joe's  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
Ventura High School  
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**Newsletter Layout**

Ellen Pearson

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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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**Rheto-Rick**

## May My Prayer Be Your Prayer

By Rick Pearson  
Executive Director Emeritus

I suppose that, intellectually, I have always known that there would be a last Rheto-Rick column for me as executive director of Project Understanding. But, like contemplating one's own death, one hopes it is still a long way away.

Since last fall, when I announced that I would step down at the end of April, I knew that this May edition of the Project Understanding News would be my last. So for months I have been thinking about what I would write in this column. I have written more than 250 col-

umns for this publication (counting those I wrote before I became executive director). After so long a time and so many words, I want this last one to be, well, memorable.

Of course for something to be memorable isn't the same as being something that one has to memorize. I mean, for years — maybe going back to the day it was given — school children have been forced to memorize Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. "Four score and seven years ago . . ." But that address would have been memorable whether anyone could recite it word for word or not.

Memorizing things seems to be passé now, but was once a common part of every child's education. My own parents had a number of poems that they

**See Prayer on P. 5**

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