

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING NEWS

A newsletter for the volunteers
and supporters of Project
Understanding



Volume XVIII No. 9

September 2003

Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction Coming October 11

The Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction is rapidly approaching and is just a month away. The

auction is scheduled for October 11, 2003, in the Pacific View Room of the Ventura County Government Center.

As we have said in previous months, the auction will feature many goods and services related to the theme of Home improvements. We greatly appreciate the sponsors who are listed on this page and the businesses and individuals who have already made or promised donations.

And there are many ways for you to enjoy and help the

event. You can purchase a ticket and come to the event. Your \$25 will entitle you to enjoy dinner and to bid on the many items at the live and silent portions of the auction. You can volunteer with your friends and neighbors to help make the event possible. And you can purchase an ad in the auction program.

Please use the form on page 5 of this newsletter to respond. Still have questions? Please call Kendra at 652-1326. ♦

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The One-Stop Door for Many Services

By Linda Simson
Reception Center Coordinator

Through our one-stop "door" the homeless and low-income people of western Ventura County gain information and access to a myriad of services.

In addition to our food pantry, rental assistance/eviction prevention program, and the homeless services provided in the SARAH Center, they also gain information and access to health services available either at facilities throughout the area or at our on-site "Health Care for the Homeless" clinic. The clinic is open Tuesday and Friday afternoons from 1:30 - 3:30 p.m. On average at least ten people on each of these days

sign up in the Reception Center for TB testing, physical exams (needed for entry into alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs), or simply general health needs.

The Reception Center has recently received from California Endowment's Local Opportunities Fund, a new grant entitled "Portal-to-Health" Program. Even though the focus of this grant is on the staff, partially underwriting the salaries of our receptionist and program coordinator for the fiscal year, it will also allow us to hire an eight hour per week data entry assistant, who will help us track the health-related referrals.

Referrals are either made on the telephone by our capable

See One-Stop on Page 2

One-Stop

Continued From Page 1

receptionist, or personally in the Reception Center by a compassionate and caring case assistant. The case assistants are trained by the Reception Center coordinator to quickly, but thoroughly, go over the client's situation to ascertain the appropriate referrals. Often the client has multiple needs: health, financial, shelter, etc. The overall goal is to ensure that clients resolve their many issues as quickly as possible with minimum travel.

In all we help some 7,000 people each year. So far this year we have already seen a 6% rise in clientele as population growth and economic woes in the area cause many low-income people to live close to the financial edge. Many of them are families who are unemployed, suffering from disabilities, addictions or mental illness, and some are homeless.

Anyone who would like to volunteer as a case assistant one morning a week or even once a month, please call Kendra at 652-1326, and she will be glad to set up a tour and let you see firsthand how you can make a difference. ♦

Thanks to All for Your Support

By Chris Gonzales
Volunteer Case Assistant

Hi, I'm a volunteer case assistant for Project Understanding and I would like to thank all the team members that support this organization.

Since I've been working

here the staff and other volunteers have always greeted singles and family members with a smile and offered them help. I've watched several groups of people, of various ages come in and volunteer to help out in a variety of ways.

Project Understanding isn't just about a food voucher and rental assistance. It is also about giving support and helping needy people when they find themselves in a household crisis. There is the SARAH Center that allows them to shower, wash their clothes and get an address for mail.

I've learned to listen to those who are going through hard times and give them my support where possible. There are other organizations that we refer them to for assistance. There is so much to see and learn about as a case assistant in this organization. The needy should always remember and be thankful that Project Understanding is here, close by, and available to assist them. Because what if we weren't here? ♦

Serving the Tired and Hungry

By Jennifer Richards
Morning Receptionist

The Reception Center has offered a wonderful opportunity for us to be able to help many different people that have wandered in looking for help and support and left with a new found hope and lots of appreciation. I have been able to personally see several different people helped and encouraged.

One gentlemen that walked

through our door several months ago homeless and without gas money to bring his van in with him, just came in yesterday to tell me that he now has an apartment in Oxnard and hasn't needed our services in several months. He thanked us again for all the support that we had given him with phone calls, showers, and food.

I have also seen several people who come to Ventura on a Greyhound bus for hopes of a better place to live and end up homeless and hopeless. One gentleman came in from Colorado and stumbled upon our services. He was newly homeless and without a payee to receive his money here yet. Again, I helped him with food, phone calls, showers, and a sympathetic ear. He is now living in an apartment and has thanked us again for all of our help.

It has been satisfying to say the least, to be able to work in a job that is able to help so many people and offer hope, patience, support, and understanding to someone that may not be offered a kind word often enough. By being here for the poorest of the poor, we are able to make a difference from the ground up. I equate my position to what Mother Teresa was able to do for those that she cared for in Calcutta, India. In our Reception Center, we have posted on the wall behind me, "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."

Sitting here at my desk, greeting our clients in varying



Jennifer Richards

See Tired and Hungry on Page 3

Tired and Hungry

Continued From Page 2

conditions, sometimes dirty, sometimes mentally ill, sometimes fleeing, sometimes with a child in tow, I am always reminded of the Bible verse: “. . . For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink . . . Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” Matthew 26.

When Project Understanding opens its doors, we definitely do serve others in a way that is pleasing to God. And that is what makes this job a tributary for delivering hope and encouragement to those usually with the greatest need for those two very things, because material items can really only go so far. ♦

Fare Thee Well to Jennifer

The GOOD news is that Jennifer Spoentgen Richards, our receptionist for the Reception Center, has passed all three levels of her exams, (the Rica, CSET and her master’s exam) on her first try(!) thereby finishing her schooling at Azusa Pacific University. Hooray for Jennifer!

The SAD news for us is that she will be leaving her position here in order to student teach. Upon completion of her student teaching she will receive her credential to teach special education. It has been a real pleasure to have Jennifer as our receptionist, and we know she will excel in her new career.

Now, we must look for a replacement for Jennifer. The receptionist position is approximately 20 hours a week. The starting date would be September 8. In addition, we will be hiring a data entry assistant for eight hours per week. These two positions can be combined if someone is so inclined and has the appropriate skills.

Anyone interested in applying for either or both of these positions should pick up a job description and application at the Reception Center as soon as possible. ♦

Girl Scout Lucy Mrvichin Collects Food Donations

By Lynn Austin
Program Manager

Lucy Mrvichin (pronounced L‘merv-i-chin’) will be honored with the highest award in the Girl Scouts, The Gold Award. She started working on the award when she was 14; she’s now 17.

This has been a major effort. She has had to complete numerous projects and activities and earn the career exploration pin as well as the more difficult award for social skills, the challenge pin.

The culmination of her efforts, however, was her Gold Award Service Project to help the homeless people of Ventura County. For this, she partnered with Project Understanding. She had decided on this project because she became aware of how it was for those who have nowhere to call home. She felt that this project would improve

her collaborative skills as she approached Project Understanding and her persuasive skills as she asked for donations. She would also need to convince other girls from her troop (Troop 159) to help her.

She toured Project Understanding, learned about the programs, then asked for a list of items that we needed most and that could reasonably be expected to be donated at a department or grocery store.

Armed with this list, a few signs and plastic garbage bins, she asked permission from the Ralphs on Telegraph Road, and set up

shop in the front parking lot (see photo). She was surprised at the response. In her two-day stint, she collected two pick-up loads of hygienic supplies for homeless people and school supplies for low-income children.

We are pleased and honored that Lucy chose Project Understanding’s clients as the beneficiaries of her project. She has supplied items such as diapers and feminine products that we rarely receive as donations. It is refreshing to see youth taking an interest in the lives of less fortunate people and heartening to see youth sacrifice to demonstrate their compassion. Thank you, Lucy. ♦



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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 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.

Project Understanding

HOME IMPROVEMENT AUCTION

Saturday
October 11, 2003
6:00 p.m.

County Government Center
Pacific View Cafeteria

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Address: _____

Phone: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

E-mail Address: _____

- Tickets are \$25 per person and include a light supper, coffee and iced tea and a bidder's number for the auction. There will be no-host beverage and desert bars.

Please reserve _____ tickets at \$25 each. \$ _____ Total

- I would like to place an ad in the program.

Business Card Ad At \$25.00 \$ _____

Quarter Page Ad At \$60.00 \$ _____

Half Page Ad At \$100.00 \$ _____

Full Page Ad At \$175.00 \$ _____

- Donations of auction items related to the home improvement theme for the silent and live auction will be accepted through October 3, 2003.

I will donate the following items(s):

_____ Estimated Value \$ _____

_____ Estimated Value \$ _____

_____ Estimated Value \$ _____

- Volunteers are needed to set up, clean up, collect items, sell tickets, distribute posters and for many other tasks things needed to make this auction a success.

I would like to volunteer Yes _____ No _____

Preferred assignments: _____

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

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

Individuals

Denise Abdun-Nur
Leah Abraham
Judy Alexandre
Arthur & Dennis Anderson
Ruben & Terrie Andrade
William & Dorothy Asano
Roy & Mary Lou Ash
Lorraine Ballance
Marion Baranowski
Patricia Barrett
Herman & Ruth Beasler
Helen Beeler
Beverly Benitez
George & Sharon Berg
Elizabeth Blanchard
Donna Boeck
Jeffrey Brackett & Miriam Arichea
Douglas & Toni Bradley
Bob & Mary Braitman
Donna Branstrom
William & Mae Briggs
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Stanley & Gladys Carlson
Thomas & Joan Carr
Robert & Elaine Castle
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Walter Clark
Naomi Claypool
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Jerry & Dayna & David Crow
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Norman & Ann Hudson
JoAnn Jackley
David & Cathleen Jenkins
Craig & Donna Johnson
David & Ruth Kille
Eunice Koch
Richard & Sue Komorowski
Theodore & Marilyn Kretschmer
Janice Kuzemko
Edward & Susan Lacey
Gaylord & Muriel Larsen
Wanda Laurence
Byron & Rene Lawler
Warren & Lucille Lewis
Douglas & Patricia Lochner
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Rockwood & Susan Ludes
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Doris Williams
Donnet & Phyllis Wilt
Jack & Rochelle Wiltfang
John & Paulina Wolfe
Otis & Virginia Wyneken

In memory of:

Beth Young

Given by:

Earl & Marcia Wakelee

In memory of:

Dorothy Moore

Given by:

Glenda Johnson

Thank You to Supporters of Project Understanding

In memory of:

George Butler

Given by:

Glenda Johnson

In honor of:

Jeanette Ross, Happy Birthday

Given by:

Jymmye Hitch-Banhart

In memory of:

Lois Newell

Given by:

Glenda Johnson

In memory of:

Mary Jo Taylor

Given by:

Gene & De Lois Greer

In honor of:

Walter Clark's 100th birthday

Given by:

Les & Judy Vielbig

In honor of:

Walter Clark's 100th. Birthday

Given by:

Leona Lewis

Churches & Organizations

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First United Methodist Church of Ventura
Girl Scouts of Tres Condados, Girl Scouts, Troop 380
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St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Ventura

The California Endowment

Trinity Lutheran Church

United Way

United Way of Central Maryland

United Way of Los Angeles County

United Way, Edison International

Ventura Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Westminster Presbyterian Church

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

Leslie Adkinson
Laura Covault
John & Irene Dunn
Lorraine Edmonson
Norma Emery
Warren & Amy Hall
Ashelei Higuera
Carol Johnson
Don & Lucy Lyman
Alphonse & Jan Marra
Roxanne McRillop
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Lucy Mrvichin
Mary Olson
Doug & Judi Partello
Robert Ponce
Jill Surmont
John & Nancy Talley
Robert & Jean Thomas
Fred & Barbara Tomblin
John Van Dollak
Leonard & Marsha Weber
Richard Wilmeth
Pierre Yoo

Churches & Organizations

Alliance for the Mentally Ill
Anacapa Bread Company
BuenaVentura Swim Club
Church of the Foothills
Community Presbyterian Church
First Baptist Church of Ventura
First Christian Church
First United Methodist Church of Ventura
FOOD Share

Full of Beans Bakery & Coffee Shop

Girl Scouts of Tres Condados

Grace Lutheran Church

Gumballs Etc.

Mission Uniform & Linen Services

National Charity League

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SPAN

St. Paul's Episcopal Church of Ventura

Trader Joe's

Trinity Presbyterian Church of Camarillo

Unitarian Universalist Church

University of La Verne

Ventura Housing

Ventura Missionary Church

Vons Grocery, Harbor Blvd.

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Newsletter Layout

Ellen Pearson

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Rheto-Rick

Charity Car Washes

By Rick Pearson
Executive Director

I had my car washed the other day. I suppose an objective observer who saw it the day before would have said, "It's about time." A combination of early morning dew and windy weather had joined together to leave my car quite dirty.

But once I had made the decision to get it washed I had a number of options of how to get it done. Of course, I could have done it myself in my driveway. Or I could have taken it to any of a number of self-serve locations where they supply the water and soap and I supply the muscle.

Or I could have let someone else do it at one of the commercial car washes around the area. Or I even could have taken it to one of the high schools and let the wrestling team or the band boosters wash it to raise money.

In the end I had it washed

by a group of people raising money, but not for some charitable effort.

The people who washed my car were raising money for the funeral expenses of their father.

About a dozen times a year or so I see different people washing cars in a restaurant parking lot near Project Understanding. They are usually holding up signs announcing that the money will be used for funeral expenses for a family member.

A death in the family is a sad thing regardless of the income level of the family. For most of us the cost of the funeral expenses may be a matter for family discussions, but it is not the primary issue. For too many of our low-income neighbors, the cost of burying their loved one becomes THE issue.

An old poster says, "It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the Air Force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber."

It is my dream—it is my goal—to live in a world where no family has to choose between paying the rent and burying their father. ♦

Highlights

P. 1: Project Understanding Home Improvement Auction coming October 11.

The one-stop door for many services.

P. 2: Thanks to all for your support.

Serving those who are tired and hungry.

P. 3: Fare thee well to Jennifer Richards.

Girl Scout Lucy Mrvichin collects food donations.

P. 5: Home Improvement Auction registration form.



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