



# Service Saturdays Filling A Need In The Community

By D. L. White

In the days when the American west was still being settled, the Pony Express was implemented (April 3, 1860) by the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company to deliver mail between Missouri and California, thus providing a valuable and viable service.

Utilizing the motto, "The Mail Must Go Through: Rain, sleet, snow nor dark of night will not defray or stay our course."

Fast forward, Service Saturday's were first initiated in 2011 to fill a need – a vast need – in the Phoenix community, and from those early outreach opportunities Project Humanities was born.

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Very similar to the Pony Express, Project Humanities believe the "Services and Outreach Must Go Forward."

Heat, dark of night, cold will not defray or stop the outreach and distribution from going forward, thus providing a reliable and refutable service. Unless it rains.

"We are here every other Saturday," noted Dr. Lester Neal, the architect and vision behind Project Humanities and Service Saturdays.

adding, "Unless it rains. We will not setup if it is raining, that is the one thing that will prevent our setting up. We will not distribute wet/soggy clothing."

Phoenix ranks nationally (12th) as it relates to homeless individuals. California ranks No.1, followed by New York, Florida, Texas, Massachusetts, and Oregon. ([www.world-populationreview.com](http://www.world-populationreview.com)).

Across the country, homelessness is up 1.5 percent, with 67.7 percent of those being homeless are single individuals and the remaining 33.3 percent being families.

California's 151,270 homeless individuals comprise both individuals and families according to the World Population Review.

While most outreach services distribute food, the goal from the beginning for Project Humanities/Service Saturday was the distribution of gently (and new) clothing items, shoes, and accessories and toiletries.

"This effort grew out of a direct and ongoing need in this community. Our goal is to make a small dent in a rather large real issue. We appreciate any and all support, donations and prayers," Lester recalled.

Lester is the foundation professor of English and the former Dean of Humanities in the School of Liberal Arts. He is the founding director of Project Humanities at Arizona State University.

Charged with the task by ASU leadership to create a program that would increase student interest in the Humanities, Lester accepted the challenge and began directing his energy toward the challenge.

A reasonable question raised was "Have we (society/community) lost our humanity?"



During the programs 10th Anniversary in November (2021), special guest keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Bernice King, daughter of the slain civil rights stalwart Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed the question and replied, "Most days I would say yes! Our nation has evolved and we have allowed technology to overtake our lives. I am concerned that the authentic is being taken over by the artificial."

King offered this: "I challenged all of us to bridge the gap between technology and humanity. Hold on to human connections and not allow ourselves to become consumed by technology, in spite of its many benefits."

"It is by raising social awareness and striving to demonstrate and elevate the humility that we are able to create social change," noted Ms. King, a licensed minister and direc-

tor of the King Center for Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia.

Project Humanities has evolved and grown to address a plethora of issues, in different formats from virtue presentations on Human Sexuality, Poverty Porn in relation to the Homeless issue, to imagery and how objects and pictures can and do perpetrate misinformation to an annual A Hack-A-Thon event each fall allows teams of individuals to use their insight to address technical and social concerns.

"Project Humanities "seeks to connect the college and local communities by facilitating conversations of understanding, talking, listening and connecting diverse communities," shared Lester.

"There are many misconceptions about the homeless and one of the most important lessons my students take away from this experience is

that those that find themselves in this current state (homelessness) are not just people with drug or alcohol issues, many are people that just faced difficult times," Lester said.

"I have been involved in the outreach effort from its inception and I have witnessed the growth and the service first-hand," shared Ramona Fetters.

"We (Omega Psi Phi Fraternity) are honored to play a role in this ongoing effort," shared Michael Brown of the fraternity.

"There is an ongoing need to restock every week. Every Friday volunteers sort donations and label clothes and shoes for distribution Saturday. It's quick and easy and extremely important," Brown shared.

To volunteer and to learn more about the ASU Project Humanities Service Saturday's visit [projecthumanities.asu.edu](http://projecthumanities.asu.edu).

**VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.** Service Saturdays participants are all setup and ready to distribute clothing and shoes. This assortment will be gone in two hours. The truck is all packed and ready for the next Service Saturday. COURTESY ASU PROJECT HUMANITIES.