2006 is the Year You Can Make a Difference

By Federal Glover

This has been a busy year for East County as we have had to contend with growth issues, traffic and a still struggling economy. I introduced the vessel ordinance to rid our waterways of dangerous and unsightly vessels and the renters' ordinance, which improves the conditions for renters. I and other local officials have also been laying down the groundwork for some initiatives that will start to bear fruit in the coming year. These include:

The Institute of Industrial Training which I introduced last month will start to accept and train local workers for the high-skill and high-paying jobs of the refineries and other industries that still form a vital segment of Contra Costa County's economy. The county will oversee the Institute, which will be funded by local industry and grants. The classes and tests will be run by the Contra Costa Community College District out of Los Medanos College. All of East County will benefit as our kids are placed in good-paying jobs so that can afford homes here and live near their families

AIDS and HIV continue to take its toll. East County is not immune. East County is home to about 220 people living with AIDS. There are 2,500 people living with AIDS in the entire County. Thousands more live with HIV. The East County AIDS Task Force held its second annual health fair earlier this month in Bay Point. While white men make up the bulk of our AIDS population, a disproportionate number are African Americans. Latinos and women make up the fastest growing segments of those people contracting AIDS and HIV. The task force will continue to educate the public about these diseases.

For several months, educators, law enforcement officers, social workers and community members have been meeting as the Gang Task Force to share information and combat the growing problem of gangs and gang culture in our neighborhoods and schools. The formation of the Task Force provided the first forum for many of these individuals and agencies to meet with each other even though gang "turf" overlaps city and school boundaries. Next year, the task force will concentrate on preventing our kids from being lured into a gang.

The segment of our community that has a tremendous impact on the quality of family life, our attitudes towards AIDS, the lure of gangs and raising our children, is the faith community. This past year, members of the religious community -- Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians and Sikhs, Pentecostals and Hindus, Methodists and Seventh Day Adventists – have been meeting to find ways to cooperate with each other in order to reassert their influence to improve our community and family life. While it began in Pittsburg, it will soon expand to include the rest of East County and other faiths.

In addition I will continue to work with our elected representatives at the city, state and federal levels to improve our traffic situation with Highway 4, discourage the Los Angelization of East County, reinforce our levees, improve educational opportunities and encourage more businesses and jobs for East County.

If you take all of these things, you'll see that they are all related to each other: Traffic, growth, education, jobs, our families, our quality of life. Any progress we make in any of these areas, improves the chances of progress in another.

Next year, the County will work hard to come up with fair contracts with our public employee unions. At the same time the Board of Supervisors is trying to lessen the impact the negotiations might have on the County programs and services: animal services, road improvements, the county health system, social services, code enforcement, the courts, fire protection and the Sheriff's Office. There will be opportunities too as we tackle what to do with the Naval weapons station, proceed with eBART planning, continue widening of Highway 4, help revitalize our downtowns, open new trails and preserve our open space.

I encourage all of my constituents to get involved, in our schools, our libraries, our planning boards, the MACs and all the special districts that look over our sanitation, our water, roads and levees, the nonprofits that protect our environment, feed the less fortunate and speak for the voiceless. Local government and local organizations are where ordinary individuals -- whether you have lived here a half-century or just bought a new home here, stay-at-home parents or commuters, butcher, baker or computer chip maker -- can and do make a difference. You will begin to read stories in the newspaper about the good work of the people – people just like you -- trying to make these initiatives work to improve the life for all of us who live in East County – our neighborhoods, our region, our village.

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