

Small Steps Towards Recovery

By Federal Glover

First of all, I want to thank all of you who called or sent cards and flowers wishing me well and expressing support for my family. Your prayers must have worked. Janis and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Unfortunately, I'm not well enough to go home. Fortunately, my staff is keeping me up to date on all the goings on in East County and at the Board of Supervisors.

Now that the doctors have given me permission to use my laptop computer, I'd like to follow up on two initiatives: the Building Community process I began in spring and the Gang Summit held last month.

Michael Moon and Jay Umeh, the two professors from California State University-Hayward who facilitated the Building Community process, presented their report to the Board of Supervisors in August. Based on the 3-day long dialogue with East County residents, they found East County's top three concerns centered around housing, youth and economic development.

Surprisingly, transportation issues, which usually tops East County problems, was discussed but came in a close fourth. The professors felt that transportation-- which includes widening Highway 4 and alternate modes of transit -- could be addressed under economic development.

The entire report can be read on my website at <http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/depart/dis5/>.

The Board of Supervisors is the first government entity to accept the Building Community report and ordered county agencies and employees to support action and policies that address those issues.

The next step is getting buy-in from the cities, school districts and other unincorporated communities. I plan to present the report to the decision makers of East County on Nov. 29 so that all of us can be on the same page when we try to fix some of the problems we face. Even though some city council members, school board members and MAC members attended the initial meetings, those bodies will bear the burden to implement the report's recommendations.

The Gang Summit, which was held at the East County Boys and Girls Club in Pittsburg and attended in the by almost 500 people from all over the country, exceeded my expectations in terms of attendance, content and enthusiasm.

For those of you who want to hear what went on at the Gang Summit, most of it will air on Contra Costa Television (CCTV) on Tuesday, Oct. 30 at 10 a.m. and Thursday, Nov.

1 at 6 p.m. For most of us, Comcast is on Channel 26. Also, check on the blog at myspace.com/gangsummit.

Based on response from those who attended, the Summit was uplifting, eye-opening and inspirational – and long overdue.

I was supposed to conduct the final discussion about what we can do next to stop the spread of gangs in East County. Unfortunately, because of my deteriorating health, I wasn't able to attend.

One of the positive offshoots of staging the Gang Summit is that we have made contact with the Governor's Office and demonstrated that the various entities doing prevention and suppression work against gangs can act cooperatively and in a coordinated manner.

That will be a big positive as we try to secure some of the state and federal funding that is going towards fighting gangs.

I hope that the Gang Task Force will be able to provide help to all the separate entities – nonprofits and community-based organizations -- who in their own targeted way, are providing alternatives to the values perpetuated by the street gang culture that has torn apart communities. An ongoing blog on gang matters can be found at myspace.com/gangsummit.

As readers of this column know, I have been a strong advocate for engaging more people in the public discourse. It has always been my intent to have East County residents involved in finding the solutions to some of the larger issues facing us. The processes spurred by the Gang Summit and Building Communities forums are not the answers unto themselves, but are only vehicles with which we can move forward together.

However, we are establishing a common language, a shared set of values that will enable all of us to move towards establishing a stronger foundation on which we can build.

The solutions emerging from this dialogue will need a commitment from each and every one of us. Any success on these issues will depend in large part on how engaged private citizens, the public sector and community-based organizations are willing to be part of that solution.

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