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Glover: Youth seek a place in a brave, new world

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Guest Columnist

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Some people yearn for the days of their youth when they were carefree, the world was wide open to them and the future was full of promise.

Not me.

I look at my grandchildren and I wonder what kind of world they will live in. There is a real possibility that the world they inherit will be less promising than the world my peers and I grew up in and inherited from our parents, members of the "greatest generation," as Tom Brokaw likes to call pre-baby boomers who grew up during the Depression, stepped up to the plate during World War II, and took advantage of the opportunities provided by a nation that would forever more be the leader of the free world.

From the age of prosperity, we are now counting pennies.

From an era when low-cost college for everyone was becoming a reality, we are talking about dismantling California's educational system, once one of the greatest educational institutions in the world.

From walking on the moon, now we're afraid to walk to the grocery store.

From a time when blue-collar and white-collar jobs were plentiful to today when corporations are sending jobs offshore and American workers must compete with workers in India and China.

From a time when being an American high school graduate meant a ticket to the middle class, to this time when graduating high school no longer is enough for a good paying job and a college education is becoming more out-of-reach for low-income and middle-class students.

From an America where if you worked hard and stuck by the rules, you could earn a piece of the American dream, we are becoming a country where the gap between the haves and have-nots is growing wider.

More and more, we are becoming a community of strangers and a hand up just as likely to be a hand pulled back. Our community institutions where we used to seek help are overwhelmed with people who for the first time, are asking for assistance.

In this brave, new world of instant communication, instant gratification, infinite information sources and fame is just a reality show away, a kid can easily be overwhelmed by a barrage of influences, some well-meaning but too many are negative. Too many feel entitled and too many have given up hope.

Ever since I was in school and became a manager in the Neighborhood Youth Corps, the welfare of young people is something that has always been close to my heart and has guided many of my efforts as a community leader. Investing in young people is investing in our future.

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As a Pittsburg City Council member and as the city's mayor, I encouraged the growth of the city's recreation programs and summer jobs for youth.

At that time I also began the youth summits so that young people could receive valuable information that could affect their future in a friendly and nonthreatening environment. From a city event, the youth summits, an entire day of music, workshops, recreation and physical challenges, have grown each year with young people coming from all over the county.

It is a time to help young people meet people and programs that might make adolescence a little bit easier to deal with whether it is peer pressure, girlfriend-boyfriend problems, job hunting or furthering your education. The day is also a day to meet new friends, have fun with sumo wrestling, and see the latest dance steps and martial arts.

This year's youth summit will be held on April 24 at Los Medanos College in Pittsburg, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It is free and open to all young people sixth grade through high school.

I am always seeking new ways and programs to provide a better environment for young people to reach their full potential. Involved young people make for good citizens and good citizens make our communities and neighborhoods better places to live and work.

Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover represents District 5. Reach him at dist5@bos.cccounty.us

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