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## Glover: Hunger is more prevalent in Contra Costa this year

By Federal Glover  
Guest Columnist

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Normally, during this time of year I try to keep myself in the spirit of the season, but this year it is more difficult to remain positive when so many are experiencing the worst economic period since the Great Depression.

The national jobless rate is around 9.8 percent. In parts of Contra Costa County, it is closer to 20 percent. That means in those communities, one out of five workers is without a paycheck.

That means fewer gifts bought, given and received.

That means less business for local merchants and restaurants.

That means more families will be in danger of losing their homes.

That means more families will go hungry.

That means more families will join those who are just a paycheck away from being on the streets.

That means our frayed social safety net of churches, local government agencies and community-based organizations -- already hit hard by shrinking funding sources and hampered by employee

cutbacks -- will find it difficult to pick up the slack.

Hunger is far more prevalent in our communities than many of us realize, and in the past two years it has significantly increased. In July 2008 there were approximately 16,000 Contra Costa households receiving supplemental food assistance (formerly known as "food stamps"). Now there are more than 28,000 households receiving food assistance -- an increase of 67 percent in just two years and caseloads continue to grow each

month.

Many of the families now turning to the county for help have never received social services before. Like most of you, they held jobs, paid mortgages, etc. Almost overnight, many of them suddenly found themselves destitute.

The average monthly allotment of supplemental food assistance rarely lasts until the end of month, and the use of food banks is an essential part of a family's food survival strategy.

Our food bank has clearly seen the impact of the recession on the same scale that we have. More than 89,000 Contra Costa residents a month must now use the food bank -- an increase of 63 percent in three years, and 28 percent of those being helped are children. The food bank has struggled to keep up with the demand and distribution of over 12 million pounds of food last year in Contra Costa and Solano counties, but it's still not enough.

Please join me in my efforts to assist those who are hungry as Contra Costa County challenges Solano County to the "County Cares, Food Fight," a competition to determine which county and which county department can raise the most funds to address this calamitous matter. The county food drive competition will run through Dec. 31;

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however, the food bank accepts donations all year long as distribution occurs continuously.

Every dollar makes a difference; 95 cents out of every dollar goes directly to providing food, and the food bank can turn every \$1 donation into \$3 worth of nutritious food. If you donate even \$5, then you're helping provide \$15 in food to a hungry household.

Checks should be made out to the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano and will simply pass through our office to be tabulated on behalf of our county and department. Donations made in excess of \$10 will receive a tax donation letter. Send checks to 315 E. Leland Road, Pittsburg, CA 94565.

Is your agency conducting its own food drive? Consider forwarding your financial donations in the form of a check made out to the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano to Supervisor Glover's office so we can forward it to the food bank for you and it will count in the "Food Fight" challenge, an opportunity to increase your effectiveness.

And if you prefer and find it in your heart to contribute directly to another local agency, please do so. Some of the smaller programs take food donations but dollar contributions go beyond the cash value and many of the agencies and cupboards don't have storage capabilities.

Your consideration of even a small donation would be extremely appreciated. If we all give a little it will go a long way.

Please remember the reasons for the season, whether it is Hanukkah, Muharram (Muslim New Year), Kwanzaa or Christmas. I have faith that the good, compassionate people of East County will find it in their hearts to come through in these difficult times.

Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover represents District 5. Reach him at [dist5@bos.cccounty.us](mailto:dist5@bos.cccounty.us).

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