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County prepares for Youth Summit

by Justin Lafferty

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Bullying runs rampant throughout schools, but one local politician hopes to reverse the trend.

Contra Costa County District V Supervisor Federal Glover, who represents the East County areas of Pittsburg and North Antioch, will host the annual Youth Summit on March 31 at Los Medanos College in Pittsburg. The event runs from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and admission is free.

The summit's focus is bullying, which has evolved from punches to posts on Facebook, as social media becomes more popular among young people. The summit plans to teach local students ways they can stop bullying, as well as build character.

"Bullying occurs in our playgrounds, our schools and on the Internet," Glover said in a press release. "Bullying can be physical or it can be emotional. It has led to reputations being destroyed and, in worst case scenarios – suicide by some of the victims."

The summit offers a multitude of resources for young people. Among the summit's speakers are Glover, District Attorney Mark Peterson and motivational speakers Mark Blackshear and Toni Blackmon. Peterson will outline the county's new truancy policy, which allows sheriff's deputies to either detain kids found off school grounds or give them a ride back to campus.

Kaiser Permanente's Educational Theatre Program will perform "Nightmare on Puberty Street," which explores the challenges of teenage life.

The summit will also provide a session on cyber bullying, which has grown over the years as more high school and middle school students log onto websites such as Facebook and Twitter.

In addition to speakers, several Contra Costa County organizations will be present to discuss with young people the dangerous realities of gang life, how to get a job and how to responsibly manage money as a high school student.

Glover's office has reached out to students in middle and high schools all over his district, and anticipates roughly 700 in attendance. Ed Diokno, a spokesman

for the supervisor, feels that since the summit hasn't tackled the issue of bullying before this year, this is a good time for it.

"It's been building up, and we were talking and discussing it among ourselves," Diokno said. "The kids who have attended in the past have enjoyed themselves. We have very little dropoff from morning to the end."

The summit will also host several fun activities, including a K-9 demonstration by the Pittsburg Police Department, a dance performance from the Dancin' Diamonds, airbrush tattoos, a karate demonstration, free manicures and pedicures as well as a three-on-three basketball tournament. Lunch and breakfast will also be provided for free.

"There's a lot of useful information for young people, presented in a non-threatening way," Glover wrote in a press release. "Besides, it is a lot of fun."

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