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Comfortable retirement becomes far-fetched dream for many

By Tom Vacar

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OAKLAND, Calif. — The nation is staring down the barrel of a rapidly growing permanent underclass of Americans who have little or nothing in the way of retirement plans, let alone retirement assets.

Sanda Vallalobos helped hand out produce in Pittsburg Tuesday for the Contra Costa Food Bank.

"Right now, I'm a volunteer. Usually, I'm standing in line with the rest of the folks and trying to get some help here," says Villalobos.

There will be no retirement in her future.

"No, there'd just be no way, I mean it's pretty impossible nowadays," she says.

Former Army soldier Martin Woodin comes here for food often.

"I tried to save and it didn't work out. I became broke and couldn't buy anything so I came to the Food Bank," says Woodin.

The highly respected Employee Benefit Research Institute says 36 percent of working-age Americans have less than a thousand dollars in savings or investments for retirement and 60 percent have less than \$25,000.

"\$25,000, we all know, is not going to be enough money," says Holly Gillian Kindel. She is with Mosaic Financial Partners, a firm that serves wealthy clients but she volunteers time to help those struggling to save.

"Most people are human and one reason that they don't start is because they don't know what the next first step should be," says Kindel.

Many people simply make too little money to save and make ends meet while others are in deep denial about saving for retirement.

"They see the two-thirds, three-quarters of Americans that also haven't and they can justify not saving," says Golden Gate University Professor of Consumer Psychology, Kit Yarrow.

Yarrow says many Baby Boomers who are reaching retirement age think their work ethic and optimism will see them through.

"Those two things, I think, have allowed Boomers to think, 'Oh, I'll just keep working.'" says Yarrow.

But the reality is, according to the study, flies in the face of work ethics and optimism.

"It's extremely high: people who are forced out of the workplace early on; earlier than they were planning on," says Kindel.

And so, for a growing percentage of the population, the dream of a comfortable retirement will be exactly that, just a dream.