

# Mark Williams to head teen center at Golf Mill

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Mark Williams is the new director of the Niles Teen Center, which held its official grand opening Sept. 15 at its new quarters at Gold Mill Shopping Center.

*(Jean Wagner/For Pioneer Press)*

Capping off two months of major changes, Mark Williams was named the new youth coordinator at the Niles Teen Center last week.

The teen center moved on Aug. 1 from a Niles Park District facility on Howard Street to the Golf Mill Shopping Center off Milwaukee Avenue and Golf Road. Then on Aug. 28, the village trustees took over sole management of the teen center after previously sharing the funding and management with the Park District.

Last Saturday, the Teen Center hosted its grand opening ceremony at Golf Mill.

The timing worked well for introducing Williams, said Assistant Village Manager Steven Vinezeano..

"This (was) a great opportunity for Niles teens and the community to come and see the new teen center location and meet our new youth coordinator," Vinezeano said. "Mark has some incredible ideas for the new center and how he plans to engage Niles teens."

Williams, 31, started at the position last week, after working for the past eight years as a middle school social studies teacher. That teaching background will be a benefit, said Williams, as he wants his teen center to be more than just a place to play games -- he also wants it to be a place to study and get help with homework.

"I don't want it to just be a place of entertainment," Williams said.

There certainly will be room for teens to play games, though.

Inside the new center is a foosball table, air hockey, computers, a large TV, and many other options for activities.

"I kind of envision my role as giving kids a safe and engaging place to go and hang out in the after-school hours," Williams said.

Youths between sixth and 12th grade are allowed to use the center. The annual fee for Niles residents and teens attending Niles schools is \$5. A \$20 non-resident annual fee was approved by village trustees last month, anticipating increased visitors with the new mall location.

Williams sees the mall location as a great way to attract more teens.

"I think it's absolutely amazing," he said of the new location. "It's probably the best idea I've ever heard of."

Along with local buses bringing in a stream of passengers regularly to the mall, including the Niles free bus routes, the mall is a magnet for local youth in general.

Williams said he envisions visitors coming by to shop and hang out at his center, as well as parents dropping off their teenagers while they shop.

Williams is local, having grown up in Park Ridge, attending Lincoln Junior High School and Maine South High School.

The teen center, located at Entrance 6 facing Greenwood Avenue between the Showplace 12 Theaters and Sears, is open Tuesday through Friday, 1 p.m. to 7 p.m.