

Move to mall credited with teen center revival

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It's been nearly a year since the Niles Teen Center moved to its new digs at the Golf Mill Shopping Center, and things have never been busier.

"We've set record numbers," said Mark Williams, director of the teen center. "We had 84 families sign up this month."



Andrew Grabowski (left to right), 12, Matthew Shwed, 11, Andrew Kliczko, 12, Michael Krone, 12 Sebastian Turchel, 13 and Sam Halley enjoy a rousing game of foosball at the first Night in the Mall Lock-In June 15.

(Eric Davis/for Pioneer Press)

Williams, who took the helm at the center last year, spent a lot of time visiting Niles schools to promote the facility. But he partly credits the center's new success with moving to Golf Mill from its former home at a Niles Park District facility on Howard Street.

"It's great to have it here at the mall," Williams said. "There's greater visibility. The kids can go around to the food court, or shopping. It's also a good place for parents to drop their kids off when they're shopping -- especially middle-school boys."

The new facility has a 1,512 square feet of space that features a computer lab, a lounge with a big-screen TV and karaoke machine, a game room with a variety of video games and board games, and a kitchenette with snack machines, a microwave and a toaster oven.

Williams also thinks the surge in membership was due to the recent "lock-in" at the mall, during which 85 teenagers slept over at Golf Mill.

"The lock-in especially was a major driving force behind it," he said.

The event was the first of its kind, and Assistant Village Manager Steve Vinezeano was on hand to make sure everything went smoothly.

"I was there the entire night," he said. "It was a great time and a great group of kids."

Vinezeano said Williams had a lot of big ideas.

"He's got so much going on over there," he said. "In the future we might have to take a look at getting them a bigger space."

Williams, meanwhile, is trying his best to serve all his new teenagers.

"This month has just been killing me," he said. "But I'm seeing a lot of support from the village."

The village has given Williams three full-time employees, two part-timers and an emergency staffer to help in case the going gets rough.

The center is using a sign-in sheet right now to monitor the children's whereabouts, but Williams hopes to soon have scannable membership cards.

Go to www.pioneerlocal.com/niles to comment on this story.

TEEN CENTER INFORMATION

Niles Teen Center, 373 Golf Mill Center (Entrance 6), is open from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, and closed Mondays. The center hosts special events on weekends. For membership information call (847) 375-8949, or go to www.nilesteencenter.org.