

Niles Teen Center expands with community support

By **TONY BERTUCA** tbertuca@pioneerlocal.com

The Niles Teen Center is set to move forward with an expansion plan this summer that would allow the facility to add activities and accommodate more children.

"The teen center has been doing extremely well," said Teen Center Director Mark Williams. "We opened at Golf Mill 18 months ago and especially in the last 12 months we have been doing very well."



The Niles Teen Center, located at Golf Mill Mall, is expanding with the help of Wal-Mart, Home Depot, the mall and the village.

(C. Jason Brown/for Pioneer Press)



Jordan Martinez (foreground), 13, of Chicago, plays Guitar Hero with Marcin Jaskolski, 13, of Des Plaines, at the Niles Teen Center Friday.

(C. Jason Brown/for Pioneer Press)

» [Click to enlarge image](#)



Maria Pfister (center), 12, of Park Ridge, shares a laugh with Luiza La Sorella (right), 13, also of Park Ridge, while watching friends play Guitar Hero at the Niles Teen Center Friday.

»



Ryan Abens, 17, of Morton Grove, plays darts with Sean Miller (right), Niles Teen Center supervisor, Friday at the center.

»

In fact, Williams said, the center has a welcome problem -- they have too many teens and too little space.

"The teen center has seen record levels of activities and participation," he said. "But the teens are falling all over each other."

The 1,512-square-foot center located inside Golf Mill mall services approximately 20 teens on an average day but has seen a one day high of 45 teens. Williams said his total enrollment was 250 teens and constantly growing.

"Expansion is needed because higher numbers of teens in a lower space leads to fights, disagreements, and theft," he said. "It's not that I'm saying we've had those problems but I see them happening down the road."

Williams asked the village board Tuesday night to approve his plan to knock down a teen center wall and expand into the neighboring space, adding 1,001 square-feet to the existing facility.

Williams said the extra space would be used to separate academic activities from play activities and would also allow him to increase the center's enrollment.

The teen center has been able to secure \$30,000 in goods and services from Home Depot for the expansion as well as \$3,000 in services from Golf Mill Shopping Center and \$13,500 in equipment from the Niles Public Library. Wal-Mart also cut the teen center a check for \$2,500.

"Home Depot is offering to do all of the labor for us," Williams said.

With all the local assistance, Williams only had to ask the village board for \$5,637 to operate the expanded center and his request was unanimously granted Tuesday night.

Mayor Robert Callero praised the local entities which stepped up to the plate to assist the teen center in its expansion mission.

"We are very proud of the businesses in our community and we thank them very much for responding to our needs," he said.

Williams said he hoped to begin work on the expansion some time in June and expected it to be completed by the end of the summer.