

Niles Teen Center to expand

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By: Jason Lee, Triblocal.com staff reporter

The Niles Teen Center is slated to nearly double in size this summer to rectify a welcomed problem – too many kids, not enough space.

The teen center, which in 2007 relocated to the Golf Mill Shopping Center, has 250 members and continues to draw new teens. It attracts an average of 20 teens a day, and recently drew a one-day high of 45 members.

The current space is tight but packs a variety of amenities for teens – a game room offering foosball, air hockey and video games; a computer lab; a TV lounge filled with comfy furniture; and a small kitchen area. But with such a spike in turnout, the 1,512-square-foot space doesn't provide enough elbowroom or quiet areas for teens to read, study or get help with homework, said Teen Center Director Mark Williams.

"Forty-five in one day – that was nuts," Williams said.

The expansion plan, unanimously approved by the village board, would involve knocking down one of the center's walls and expanding into a neighboring vacant store, thus adding 1,001 square feet. The project would add \$5,937 in annual rent and utility costs for the village.

To help pay for expansion, the center secured about \$30,000 from Home Depot in donated labor and materials, as well as about \$13,500 in donated equipment from the Niles Public Library and \$3,000 in services from the Golf Mill Shopping Center. Wal-Mart also donated \$2,500 to the effort.

Work on the project is scheduled to begin in early June, with Home Depot donating much of the labor. Once complete, the center will feature a much-larger computer lab, expanded TV lounge and study area as well as an extra bathroom.

"This expansion will mean that teens will have an opportunity to stay out of trouble, engage with their peers and receive help with anything that they need," Williams said.

Construction work on the expansion is expected to last about a week, and Williams hopes the expanded teen center will be ready to open by summer's end.

"My hope is that the teen center becomes a staple of the community, where it's viewed as a valuable resource and an active participant in community events," he said.

-Jason Lee/ Triblocal.com reporter