

## Teen Center boosts Golf Mill's recognition

By Rick Kambic  
Staff Reporter

Not too long after the Niles Teen Center won its own national award, the center is the focal point of another substantial award: a retail award.

Because the Teen Center is inside Golf Mill Shopping Center, Golf Mill is being recognized for contributing to its community while simultaneously marketing its stores. The food court, mall security and access to the village's free bus system is what makes a good habitat for teenagers.

Golf Mill Shopping Center was recently named one of

four finalists for a MAXI Award, which will be announced on March 31.

Regina Verdico, Golf Mill's director of marketing and business development, said this is the first time Golf Mill has applied for this award.

"The MAXI awards are national and international award recognition for the retail industry through the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC)," Verdico said. "Golf Mill Shopping Center entered a submission for the Cause Marketing category for centers over 1,000,000 square feet. It is the most prestigious award in

the shopping center industry."

The Teen Center, previously located Golf Maine Park District, 8800 Kathy Lane in Niles, and moved to Golf Mill in 2007.

"The old Teen Center location next to a wooded area made it inaccessible to other residential areas," Verdico said. "Membership was low, and there were only 722 visits to the center over the course of an entire year."

She said the center's current high visibility benefits both the kids and the mall.

While incorporating a community entity into a shopping mall is a growing concept in the retail world, the service side of it is flourishing just as much.

Aside from the successful programs the teen center has implemented, its recent Bring Ideas Award from Harvard University recognized the center's location inside Golf Mill as a strong point when creating activities for teens.

Mark Williams, the director of the Niles Teen Center, said he was often sought out for advice by organizers in local communities, but winning the national award brought even more.

"Every month or so I'll get an occasional e-mail from either somebody local or somebody from another state asking for details on what we do and how we got to this point," Williams

said. "Just over the weekend I got an e-mail from a parent in Mundelein who told me about a group of kids that want to ask the village for their own teen center facility."

Williams said he isn't very familiar with the MAXI awards, but had no problem contributing to their submission.

"They came in and took some video of the kids and did some interviews after I provided them with certain documentation," Williams said. "And the mall has been a great partner in helping us grow to what we are today, so we were more than happy to help."

[rkambic@buglenewspapers.com](mailto:rkambic@buglenewspapers.com)