

Golf Mill Shopping Center: Teen Center, mall partnership lauded

By NATALIE HAYES Contributor

For the past four years the Niles Teen Center has called Golf Mill Shopping Center home. This year the partnership between the two has earned national recognition as a finalist in the International Council of Shopping Centers "MAXI Award" for cause-related marketing.

Each year an award is given to the shopping center that is found to have the best interaction with a charity. Other subcategories of the award given are for best social media campaign, best public-relations department and more.

"The Niles Teen Center's partnership with Golf Mill was recognized because of their close ongoing partnership," said Mark Williams, director of the Niles Teen Center.

The Niles Teen Center is an after-school program for sixth- through 12th-grade students in local junior high and high schools, and attracts teenagers from Gemini Junior High, Emerson Middle School, Maine East and South, and other area schools. It's a place for teenagers to hang out after school, work on homework, play video games and bond with one another.

The Teen Center started about 10 years ago as a grassroots organization of teenagers getting together after school at the Niles Park District building, but after the village of Niles took over the program in 2007, it was moved to its new home in Golf Mill.

Williams said the mall was the perfect place for the center to be because teenagers and shopping malls go hand-in-hand.

"It seemed like the natural place to be -- this is where the kids hang out anyway so why not provide them with some structure while they're here?" Williams said. "Another bonus is the mall security -- I can call mall security instead of the police if any small issues come up."

Besides serving as a place away from home for teenagers to go to, the center also provides social-work services to teenagers and their families, family therapy, suicide-prevention services and peer-to-peer networking.

"Another intention of our center is gang prevention," Williams said. "And for those kids who have trouble connecting with their peers at school, this is a place where they can come and meet people from other schools and make friends."

While the Niles Teen Center takes advantage of having its location in a mall, Golf Mill also reaps the benefits of having a center for teenagers right on its property by using the center for marketing purposes, which didn't go unnoticed by the ICSC when the organization was considering nominees for the MAXI award.

"The program gets the mall a lot of press, and since the kids are here the parents come and use the mall," Williams said.

Golf Mill and the Niles Teen Center are partnering to provide daily activities for local teenagers and their families during Spring Break Week, March 28 through April 1. Each day from 1-3 p.m. a different activity will be featured.

That Monday will be the Niles Family Fitness Challenge; Tuesday will be Teen Center Movie Day; Wednesday will be the Luau Fashion Hunt; Denim Workshop will be Thursday; and on Friday the Teen Center will host the Pre-Lock-in Party.

The ICSC will announce the winners of the MAXI award March 31.