



Wiktoria Worach, 11, kicks up her heels with longtime partner Patryk Kot, 13, of Mt. Prospect during Thursday's "Lights On Afterschool Open House & Rally" at the Niles Teen Center in Golf Mill Mall. The pair has been dancing together for the last two and a half years. Both have danced since they were 6 years old and take lessons at the Interclub Academy of Dance in Niles. (Journal Photo)

Kids Turn Lights On

Teen Center Lauded For Promoting After-School

By **TOM ROBB**

JOURNAL & TOPICS REPORTER

Between 150 and 200 kids, parents and other community members made their way to Golf Mill Shopping Center Thursday to attend the first annual Lights On After School event at the Niles Teen Center.

Among those addressing the kids were Mayor Robert Callero, Police Chief Dean Strzelecki and representatives of East Maine School Dist. 63 and Golf Mill.

Callero said after-school time, if used properly, could make a difference in success later in life.

Strzelecki said he sees the effects of after-school programs on the street.

"After-school programs such as the Niles Teen Center, offers the children an alternative. These programs reduce crime, increase safety, and foster community pride and ownership. Kids in after school programs, exhibit an increased interest in school while expressing a

greater hope for the future," said Strzelecki. "Boys and girls that did not participate in after-school programs are four times more likely to be without high school degrees and less than half as likely to be in college."

Dist. 63 Total Learning Communities administrator Pam Surber said her schools become "hubs" for social services after

final school bells ring.

The event was the first of its kind and included a stunning performance by young dancers from a Niles dance studio.

Niles Teen Center Director Mark Williams said he intends to conduct the event again next year and solicited those who attended last week for suggestions to make next year's event stronger.