

Library On Board With Teen Center Expansion

By TOM ROBB Journal & Topics Reporter

Plans are in the works to expand the Niles Teen Center, located in the Golf Mill Shopping Center, by next May.

The expanded center would include an "extension branch" of the Niles Public Library partially funded by a private \$60,000 grant that is being applied for this week. "We are totally behind this project," Acting Niles Mayor Robert Callero said in a written statement. "It is another innovation in our Teen Center that will increase the institutional aspects while also drawing in new members."

Teen Center Director Mark Williams said he has been preparing for the expansion project for about the last four months and is still very early in the process. Williams said he will soon submit a proposal to village officials for the expansion plan. Financing of the expansion would require village board approval.

Callero said he expected village trustees to consider the Teen Center project at their February or March meeting if the grant is approved.

An 841 sq. ft. storefront next to the Teen Center was recently vacated. The storefront will be reoccupied this month by a seasonal tax preparation business until April at which time the youth center would take over the space and complete renovations by May if all goes as planned.

Total square footage would be increased from 1,500 square feet to 2,341 square feet under the plan. The Teen Center currently pays \$735 a month based on 48.5 cents a square foot to Golf Mill in rent. Williams said he has yet to meet with Golf Mill officials regarding rent for the new space but based on the current rent structure could pay an additional \$407 per month for the new space.

Williams said he has been in talks with officials from the Niles Chamber of Commerce who have made offers to off set some of the costs. Williams said he will pursue other grants and support from other sources to help off set the costs. Teen Center Supervisor Sean Miller said plans are to tear down the wall between the two storefronts. The new space would contain three rooms, a lounge, an expanded game room that might include a new pool table and Wii gaming system and an expanded library and computer room.

The library computer room would include up to 10 computers, up from the current five, a book and DVD collection and a part time librarian. Village and library sources said the computer room might include new interactive meeting technology funded through the grant that allows teens at the Teen Center to participate in programs happening at the Niles Library's main branch on Oakton Street.

The \$60,000 grant is being applied for through the International City and County Management Association (ICMA). Assistant Village Manager Steven Vinezeano said the ICMA grant is designed to encourage closer working relationships between libraries and municipalities. Niles Library Supervisor of Adult and Young Adult Fiction Services Barb Kruser said the library extension center would allow the library to reach a new population of teens who live further away from the library and could also service teens from other communities visiting the mall. Vinezeano said the grant was a perfect fit as the village already has a youth task force consisting of representatives of the village, library, park district and area schools in place and has a youth committee that reports to the village board of trustees.

The filing deadline for the ICMA grant is Thursday, Jan 8. Kruser and Vinezeano are currently working together to write the grant application and will present it to the Youth Committee soon. Vinezeano expects to know if the grant has been awarded by February.

The Teen Center is located in Golf Mill near entrance number six between Sears and the Kerasotes Movie Theater and is open to teen from sixth to 12th grades. The center had extended hours through the holidays. Regular hours are from 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays with additional weekend hours for special events.