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Talk Of Expanding Teen Center Returns

By TOM ROBB Journal & Topics Reporter

The Niles Teen Center saw a drastic increase in usage in 2008 beginning in May and continuing through the end of the year. Plans to expand the center into an adjoining storefront at Golf Mill Shopping Center and add a satellite library hit a snag when a \$60,000 grant fell through, although other donations seem to be in the works that would cover construction costs. Village, library and teen center officials met last week to reconsider options moving forward. A proposal for Niles trustees to formally support teen center expansion is expected at their meeting later this month.

Attendance at the center has increased substantially almost tripling from an average of 10 teens a day to between 25 and 30 teens since a large event was held last May held in conjunction with Golf Mill. "The benefits (of expansion) would be incredible," said Assistant Village Manager Steve Vinezeano. "Now the place is just bursting at the seams." Teen Center Director Mark Williams said much of the center's recent success is due to engagement with area schools, civic groups and the center's landlord, Golf Mill.

That and other facts about the center were outlined in the first Niles Teen Center Annual Report released last week. Williams wants to increase programming and refine and improve events moving forward. Programming is reaching a limit with current staffing levels, Williams said.

Last year a plan was hatched to double the size of the teen center by taking over an 841 sq. ft. storefront next to the teen center in Golf Mill. Part of that plan called for a satellite branch of the Niles Public Library complete with 20 computers, books and possibly a part time librarian. That plan was tied to a \$60,000 private grant request that was recently rejected.

Niles Library Supervisor of Adult and Young Adult Fiction Services Barb Kruser met with Williams, Village Trustee Kim Biederman and Vinezeano last week to discuss moving forward with plans for possible expansion without the \$60,000 grant. Vinezeano said expansion could cost as much as \$30,000 and increase annual fees for rent and gas by \$5,500. Talks currently underway with Home Depot and Wal-Mart could defray some of those costs. Vinezeano said a \$2,500 donation was secured from Wal-Mart and discussions are ongoing with Home Depot to donate labor and materials for the build out.

Biederman said she had a commitment from Home Depot to cover construction costs and was awaiting a formal letter from the company this week meaning the only real cost would be an annual increase of \$5,000 in increased rent and \$500 in utilities.

When the center opened two years ago, Vinezeano said Home Depot brought in a volunteer crew that cleaned up and painted the space. The proposed expansion project would be bigger, involving knocking down walls and installing windows and doors.