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Everybody Pitches In As Expanded Niles Teen Center Up And Running

By TOM ROBB Journal & Topics Reporter

Village employees and volunteers from the Niles Home Depot store were busy painting, installing new computer equipment and preparing to lay down carpet last Thursday in the Niles Teen Center's expanded space to prepare for yesterday's (Tuesday) first full day of use.

The Teen Center recently took over a 1,001 square foot adjacent storefront in Golf Mill Shopping Center that will increase its size to 2,513 square feet. The new space was needed after use of the center by Niles teens tripled.

Among those picking up a paint roller last Thursday was 15-year-old Maine East High School student Natasha Laws who stopped in at the center while her parents ran errands.

Village trustees Kim Biederman and Louella Preston also stopped by to check on the project's progress.

A majority of the labor and materials donated for the new space came from Home Depot with an additional \$2,500 cash grant to the center coming from Wal-Mart.

Rent for the new addition will cost an additional \$5,637 per year.

Teen Center Director Mark Williams said the goal was to open up the new space by this coming weekend in time for the center's annual lock-in event.

He said a grand opening and ribbon cutting will wait until next fall when the new space is fully equipped.

Games will be moved into the new space next week and computers would soon follow, Williams said.

Village MIS Director Bill Shaw was at the center Thursday installing new computer servers and preparing data ports for new computers.



Niles Teen Center Supervisor Sean Miller (left) paints high as Teen Center Director Mark Williams (background) paints low during Teen Center expansion work Thursday at Golf Mill.

Shaw said when the center moved to Golf Mill several years ago the transition was made quickly causing data wiring to be conducted quickly. He said he is taking the time now to wire the new space right so future expansion of computer networks in the center is made easier.

The village is applying for a federal technology grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (also commonly referred to as the federal stimulus package) that Shaw said would better connect village computer systems on a closed "intranet" system using wireless communication throughout the village that will greatly increase Internet connectivity speeds.

The new intranet connectivity would link the Niles Public Library with the teen center to help facilitate a new planned satellite branch of the Library in the teen center.

Williams is hoping to complete outfitting of the expanded center in the next month to month and a half and is currently looking for a donated pool table and flat screen televisions for the new space.