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Niles Teen Center 2007 Annual Report



Front Entrance of the new
 Niles Teen Center

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Foyer of the Teen Center

March 2008

Executive Summary

Dear Friends,

The year 2007 marked the 7th anniversary of the existence of the Niles Youth Council and 4th anniversary of the Niles Teen Center. It was a year full of transitions and challenges as we experienced both a restructuring in management and a new Teen Center home that is attracting regional attention by both community and retail mall leadership.

In June 2007, the Village of Niles assumed sole responsibility for the Niles Teen Center and Youth Council. With this change in management came an adjustment in policies, procedures and philosophy. To start, the Teen Center was relo-

cated to a converted non-retail space at Golf Mill Shopping Mall in August with the goal of attracting greater teen participation, higher visibility and giving greater access to public transportation and the Niles Free Bus. With just one week to go before the Teen Center grand opening, I was hired as the Niles Youth Coordinator, a position that will benefit greatly from my teaching experience and passion for working with teens. During the past several months, the Teen Center staff has worked diligently to develop engaging and innovative activities and to forge new relationships with local community organizations and leadership.



Over the next year, we are looking forward to the virtually endless possibilities for young adult programming.

Together with community organizations that make up the Niles Youth Task Force, whose support has allowed us to make such great strides, we can provide opportunities for growth and assistance to young people and continue to show them that they are valuable assets to the Niles community.

Sincerely,
 Mark Williams

Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the Niles Teen Center is to provide a welcoming, structured and safe environment for local area teen-agers to play games, socialize, spend time with friends new and old, receive homework assistance. The Teen Center provides opportunities for additional experiences including community service, special activities and trips, and educational programs.

For 2008, the Niles Teen Center hopes to work on the following aspects of our program: develop and refine current Teen Center programming, design a recruitment and retention plan for increasing Teen Center membership, build an improved and interactive website, work on inter-agency programs with all community stake holders, conduct a

School Administrator Breakfast/ Luncheon, become active with other local Teen Centers and Park Districts, and develop more substantive educational and community programs. These goals are in addition to the programs and activities which have already been implemented and will be discussed throughout this report.



Parents and teens playing games together

“When the Village took over they decided to go in a different direction. If you can get the kids in and get them interacting ... the key is to engage them in other activities that allow them to grow as a person.”

**Steve Vinezano
Niles Assistant
Village Manager**



Guitar Hero Tournament

In August, the Village of Niles assumed sole responsibility for the Teen Center and Youth Council after previously sharing the funding and management with the Niles Park District. On August 1st, the Teen Center was relocated from a Niles Park District facility on Howard Street to a converted non-retail space at Golf Mill Shopping Center off of Milwaukee Avenue and Golf Road.

The grand opening of the new Teen Center facility was celebrated on Saturday, September 15th in conjunction with the presentation of the numerous renovations completed at Golf Mill Shopping Mall. The Golf Mill “Scene Event” featured

Golf Mill Relocation

a “Battle of the Bands” Showdown, a Back to School Fashion Show, and special store discounts. The Teen Center grand opening was attended by approximately 75 young adults and numerous local elected public officials and Village staff.

The new Teen Center facility has seven individual rooms with a total of 1512 square feet of space and features a computer lab and homework area; a lounge with a large screen TV and karaoke machine; a game room complete with a wide variety of video, table and board games; a non-public unisex bathroom; and a kitchenette with beverage and snack machines, a microwave and a toaster oven.

The Teen Center’s relocation to Golf Mill brings countless benefits to the future of the program. Golf Mill is a regional destination for local residents of Niles, Des Plaines, Park Ridge, Morton Grove, and Glenview and beyond. The mall features an 11-unit food court, Kerasotes Showplace 12 Theatre, a staff of maintenance and security personnel, and easy access to public transportation and the Niles Free Bus. The Teen Center staff has been working closely with the Mall Management Office and mall retailers and restaurants to collaborate on events and publicity.



Ribbon cutting ceremony



Presentation by Mayor Blase

Teen Center Web Site

The current web page for the Niles Teen Center is being hosted through the Village of Niles web site. Since September, the information available has been constantly evolving. This medium should be considered our primary form of contact with the general public. Information available on the web page includes: hours and times of opera-

tion, features of the facility, detailed information about events, activities and trips, membership forms, news articles, pictures of events and activities, requests for donations and list of donors, staff profiles, history of the Niles Teen Center/ Niles Youth Council and information about the Niles Youth Task Force.

Over the next year, with the assistance of the MIS Department, we plan to design a new Teen Center web page which will be 1) theme based, 2) interactive and entertaining, and 3) more informative. Also, additional features of the new web site could include teen-created video projects and message boards.

Community Activities/ Interagency Programs

The Niles Teen Center consistently works with local agencies and government departments to collaborate on events and programs.

Niles Senior Center- We have worked with the Niles Senior Center for the Teen Job Connection program to pair willing teens with senior citizens in need of snow shoveling, leaf-raking and yard work services. We are planning an Intergenerational Pool Tournament in which the teens and seniors will either play with or against each other in a tournament setting.

Niles Park District- We worked with the Niles Park District for the 6th Annual Haunted Garage and the 4th of July Post-Parade Celebration. The 2007 Haunted Garage was a great success with a total of 38 teens participating, 250 members of the public attending and a profit being made.

Niles Chamber of Commerce and Industry- The Teen Center is working with the Niles Chamber of Commerce on the "Dollars for Scholars" scholarship program and the 4th Annual Job Shadow Day. As a member of the Chamber Scholarship Committee, Mark participated in meetings, distributed information to schools and through the Village and Teen Center web sites, encouraged teens to submit applications, and graded scholarship applications. The Job Shadow Day is planned and scheduled. We are expecting as good if not a better turn out of teens than in past years. This is a great

opportunity for teens to learn about possible careers and how their education can translate into a rewarding future.

Golf Mill Mall- Our new location at Golf Mill Shopping Center has provided many opportunities to receive assistance from the Management Office and individual retailers and restaurants. Together, we have developed a monthly Dinner & a Movie event in which teens can enjoy a nice dinner at Elephant Bar and then a movie at Kerasotes Showplace 12 Theatre. The Teen Center participated in the Festival of Giving event in which six teens volunteered and raised \$106 from ticket sales. We are working with the Management Office to host a "Night-In-The-Mall" Lock-In event in which teens will be allowed to stay overnight in the mall and participate in structured activities including dancing, a free movie, relay races, a "free expression" art wall, video game tournaments, a T-Shirt logo design contest and tons of prizes.

Niles Public Library- As of yet, we have not had much of an opportunity to cooperate on a specific program with the Niles Public Library. Teen programs from the library are being included in our quarterly newsletters. A representative from the library is participating in the planning of a Battle of the Bands event hosted by the Skokie Park District which will be publicized through the Niles Teen Center.

NNC- The Youth Coordinator is a member of the North Network Coalition which provides networking opportunities, support and education for individuals who are concerned about youth. Monthly meetings are held with educational presentations ranging from "Law Enforcement and Teens" and "Drug Trends and Issues on the North Shore" to "Peer Mentoring" and "Mandatory Reporting and Disclosure Issues".

Niles Family Services- The Niles Teen Center is working with Niles Family Services to provide training for Teen Center staff and counseling services and referrals for Teen Center members.

Niles Family Fitness Center- We have received support from the Niles Fitness Center by being provided access to their facility for our Valentine's Day Dance. In addition, Fitness Center staff has been willing to help supervise the Teen Center when we have been short handed.

Local Park Districts- We have been cooperating with local park districts including Skokie, Park Ridge and Morton Grove to provide transportation and planning for fun and active trips for teens. A couple of these trips include: skiing at Wilmot Mountain and a paintball trip to Joliet.



Teens wrapping gifts during Golf Mill's "Festival of Giving"

"[The Teen Job Connection] is a fabulous program. Ideally what we would like is for the kids to stick with [the seniors] through the winter, and then mow the lawn in the summer and rake leaves in the fall."

Kelly Mickle
Director of the
Niles Senior
Center



Teens after a day of skiing and snowboarding at Wilmot Mountain

Public Relations/ Publicity



Teens and staff playing monopoly

What is the best thing about the Niles Teen Center?

*"It has given me the opportunity to make cool friends. The staff has also really helped me do better with my homework and study."
Ramen (12)*

In order to attract and inform young adults, their parents and the community at large of the programming available at the Niles Teen Center, many forms and forums of communication need to be utilized. This includes a quarterly newsletter, a three month calendar of events, letters to Teen Center members, newsletter and flyer distribution through the local schools, library, Chamber of Commerce, Village facilities and mall poster stands, the Niles Teen Center web page, lunch time visits to schools, and newspaper articles and press releases to the local media.

Newsletter- We commonly print 3000 of the newsletters and flyers, with about 2100 sent to the local schools. Seeing great success with distribution through the "take one here" pockets on the mall poster stands, it may be advisable to increase the printing of the quarterly newsletter. Also, depending on the event, it may also be wise to reduce the printing of "event specific" flyers.

Letters to Members- The Teen Center staff has sent letters to Teen Center members approximately every two months to keep them informed of available programs and events. This type of communication is especially helpful for those members who live outside of Niles and do not attend the Teen Center on a regular basis.

News Media- The staff works to keep the local media up to date on major Teen Center events through press releases. Those news articles of specific note include the relocation of the Teen Center, the employment of Mark Williams as Youth Coordinator, the 6th Annual Haunted Garage, participation in Golf Mill's "Festival of Giving", and the Teen Job Connection with the Niles Senior Center.

Notable Publicity- There are three specific instances in which the Niles Teen Center has been noticed by unexpected agencies. First, in December 2007, there was a meeting with officials from the City of Evanston including the Recreation

Superintendent and Director of Youth Employment. These officials were interested in developing a teen center for the City of Evanston, using the relationship between Golf Mill Mall and the Village of Niles as a potential model. Second, in January 2008, a letter was received from a student at Redondo Union High School in Redondo Beach, California. As a project for a computer applications class, the students chose to create a teen center. These students took specific notice of the Niles Teen Center from the information provided on the web page. Third, a student at DePaul University pursuing her master's degree, took special notice of the programming available and the involvement of the Village of Niles for her thesis paper on civic engagement programs for teens. All three of these instances are a great complement to the Village of Niles, the Niles Teen Center and our collaborating agencies for providing engaging and innovative programming for young adults.



Homework time in the computer lab

Within the first week of employment, Mark realized that the first major forum in which to contact students is through their schools. He reached out to all of the local schools to gather their contact information and has worked to

share information with them. Recently, Mark participated in guest reader days at Mark Twain and Nelson Elementary Schools to share the joy of reading and Teen Center information with students. We are in the process of setting up

regularly scheduled lunch time visits to each of the three local middle schools. These lunch visits are an important way to connect with young adults on a personal level, attract new members, and share programming information.

School Relations

Niles Youth Task Force

The Niles Youth Task Force resumed regular bi-monthly meetings in November. The Task Force helps to give structure, purpose and direction to the Teen Center. Their purposes and goals include: providing fun and educational programs for teens, providing community involvement opportunities,

showing that teens are a community asset, and encouraging teen input into local government and other community agencies.

With new leadership and Village management of the Teen Center, we have seen increased interest and involvement from the members of the task force. We are consistently work-

ing to build and improve on relationships with each of the task force members and their respective agencies. It is one of the goals of the Teen Center to purposefully collaborate with and support the programming of member agencies.



Niles Youth Council

Niles Youth Council

The Niles Youth Council is a group of teens from 6th through 12th grade who provide support and advice on Teen Center programming, develop leadership skills and work to serve the Niles community. Since our relocation and restructuring, we have had to re-

build and redesign the Niles Youth Council. We have meetings on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month. These meetings are conducted with a formal agenda and provide appropriate information. These meetings also allow the Youth Council members an oppor-

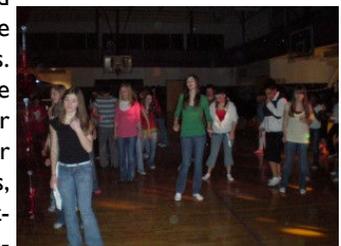
tunity to discuss issues of local, national and global importance. We currently have eleven members. However, most meetings are attended by about five to eight teens. In the near future, we hope to conduct election of officers and adopt a formal constitution and by-laws.

Power Play Grant

In May 2006, the Niles Teen Center received a grant of \$3,700 from the Illinois Association of Park Districts to implement a program that focuses on health, nutrition and fitness for children ages 10-17. The purpose of the grant was to fund a program to "fight childhood obesity". Due to our relocation, some of the plans in the original proposal are no longer feasible, especially those including outdoor activities.

We will use a portion of these funds to purchase "Dance, Dance Revolution" dance pads. A Mayo Clinic obesity research study states, "The most energy intensive of all the activities was Dance Dance Revolution ... Activity-promoting video games have the potential to increase energy expenditure in children to a degree similar to that of traditional playtime ... We think that converting seat-based screen time to activity-associated screen time is an essential approach

for promoting an active environment that is also fun for children". The goal for the DDR system is to encourage unstructured use of the equipment and to establish a regularly scheduled tournament to promote increased fitness activities. The other portion of the grant could be used for sports equipment or for speakers and presentations, possibly from the Niles Fitness Center or from Advocate Lutheran General Hospital's Children's Health Resource Center.



Teens doing a line dance at the Valentine's Day Dance at the Niles Family Fitness Center

What is the best thing about the Niles Teen Center?

"It has provided me a place to hang out and have fun with my friends, while still giving me space to be free".

Ryan (16)



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Teens gathered during the Valentine's Day Dance

Check us out at
NilesTeenCenter.org



Teens and staff at a Dinner & a Movie event



In- House Events and Activities

The staff of the Teen Center continues to build on our successes and develop new in-house events and activities. Some of these activities include drop-in programming, teen movie nights, dinner & a movie nights, and dances.

Drop-In Programs- During our weekly drop-in times, the staff purposefully organizes opportunities to actively engage teens, and the teens are generally allowed to choose any available activity. On an average day, teens receive homework assistance, play video games, visit nearby restaurants, watch television, and converse among themselves and with the staff. The most recent activities include Tournament Tuesdays and YouTube/ Karaoke Wednesdays.

Dances- The budget allows for the Teen Center to host three dances per year. However, with all of the changes in August and September, we were unable to put one together at that time. We are expecting to host a "Back to

School" dance in the September, a "Valentine's" or "Spring Break" dance in the spring and a "Summer Luau" dance in June. So far, we have hosted a Valentine's Day Dance on Saturday, February 16th. The dance was attended by 76 teens and supervised by four staff and four adult volunteers. All of the teens in attendance had a great time and are looking forward to the next dance.

Membership ID Cards- The Teen Center staff, MIS Department and the General Government Department are in the process of developing formal membership cards for Teen Center members. The MIS Department is gathering appropriate software and hardware to print photo ID cards. The system will work similar to that of the Fitness Center and the public library where cards are scanned upon entry and exit from the facility. This will help to better track facility usage, attendance frequency and gather data to support the expansion of certain programs and activities as

needed. Also, in collaboration with Golf Mill management, we hope to have sponsors' logos on the reverse side of the ID card, which would allow members certain discounts at participating retailers.

Movie Nights- Teen Movie Nights are offered the 4th Friday of each month. This is an activity in which teens and staff relax at the Teen Center while viewing a rented movie and enjoying various snacks and beverages. Dinner & a Movie nights are offered the 2nd Friday of each month. With the assistance of the Golf Mill Management Office and the cooperation of local retailers, teens are able to enjoy a meal at the Elephant Bar Restaurant for \$10 (entrée, drink and tip) and a movie at Kerasotes Showplace 12 Theatre for \$5. These evenings allow teens to participate in a slower, more comfortable environment and share in more personable conversation.

Participation and Membership

Teen Center currently has 160 members; including 55 teens that have joined since September 2007. Most of these teens are either Niles or Des Plaines residents with over 50% coming from Gemini Junior High School. Not a day goes by without the Teen Center being in use; our daily attendance is between 5 and 15. Our average weekly attendance is about 28. Approximately 100 adults and teens attended the Grand Opening event. The Haunted

Garage saw a total of 38 teens participate throughout the week, either working on construction and acting as characters. The Valentine's Dance drew a total of 76 teens.

Members come for a total of 23 different schools which includes: Culver School, Emerson, Gemini, Mark Twain, Nelson, Washington, Stevenson, St. John Brebeuf, Attea (Glenview), Lincoln (Park Ridge), Michael Collins (Schaumburg), Ebinger, North Shore Academy,

St. Juliana, St. Hillary, St. Mary of the Woods (Chicago), Niles West H.S, Maine East H.S., Maine South H.S., Notre Dame H.S., Ridgewood H.S., (Norridge), and Resurrection H.S. (Chicago). Most members tend to be in 6th, 7th or 8th grade with membership gradually dropping off into high school.

With increased exposure at school events and local advertising, it is clear that membership and participation in the Niles Teen Center will grow dramatically.