

# Bridge Teen Center celebrates two-year anniversary

HEATHER WARTHEN, Editor

Looking back, the Bridge Teen Center Founder and Executive Director Priscilla Steinmetz said it's sometimes hard to believe they've made it two years.

"We are close to 1,200 new, different students that have come in," she said. "It's overwhelming in a good way."

Steinmetz, who cofounded the center with her husband, Rob, said that when they began to build the center, they got in touch with students about the design.

"We had help from students to design the Bridge and its working," she said.

On Saturday, May 19, the center marked its second anniversary in Orland Park with a community open house. The event featured a cupcake

demo led by student Athena Tapia, free barbecue from Famous Dave's, free gelato from Nonna's and a performance by student band Sugar Rush.

Also released at the open house was the Bridge's summer program lineup which is organized into five "buckets" — mind and body, everyday life, community connections, education support and expressive arts. The free programs range from learning how to make hamburgers for Father's Day and landscape painting to learning what its like to be a pediatrician and how to change the oil in a car.

"People are always saying, 'Wow, this is free?'" Steinmetz said. "Yes, the programs are free. The Bridge is built by the community for the community.

Both parents and students

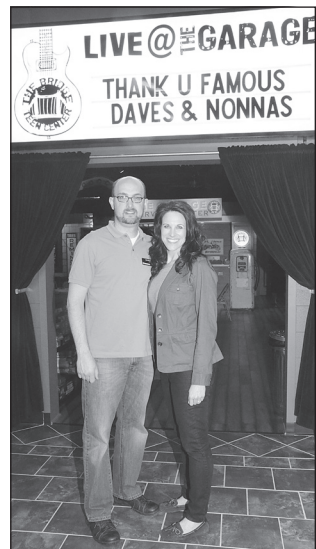
give the Bridge high marks when it comes offering teens a place they can call their own.

"I feel grateful and thankful that there is a safe place that I can drop my child off and they're just not let loose," said April Holup of Tinley Park, who recently wrote a letter thanking the Bridge. "Because my daughter's morals and values were different, she was afraid to show and express them until she came here.

"This place makes her feel wanted and loved and she's not afraid to let those things out now. I've seen her become more confident and she's grown so much."

Friends Allison Smyth and Lauren Frankenbach played a game of ping pong at the open house.

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**The Bridge Teen Center co-founders Rob (left) and Priscilla Steinmetz smile for a photo near the entrance to the center's Garage venue Saturday, May 19, during the community open house.**

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"I think it's fun, and I like to come and hang out with my friends," Smyth said.

"I really like seeing and meeting new people," Frankenbach added.

Smyth's mother, Judy, said that the Bridge gives teens a sense of independence in a safe environment.

"It feels almost like they are out, but in a protected environment," she said. "It's a well-run and nice program they have here. I've never felt unsafe having them come here."

Depending on how fundraising goes, the Bridge is looking into opening on Saturday nights for senior high students only. Steinmetz also said that there are plans for expansion as well, possibly opening up a satellite site somewhere in the southwest suburbs.

"The big thing is this not a place to students to be, but a

place for students to become and we're seeing it," she said.

And when it comes full circle, Steinmetz said it makes all the difference.

"You see a student that comes in with a low self-image and you see them a year later and how much they have blossomed," she said. "It's just amazing to hear from parents about how you made a difference in their child's life."

Because the Bridge is a nonprofit community center, donations are accepted. Current items on the wish list include gas cards, hand soap and glass cleaner, among other items. For more information on donations, call (708) 532-0500. A wish list for the center is also available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

The Bridge Teen Center is located at 15555 S. 71st Court in Orland Park.

For more information, call (708) 532-0500 or visit [www.thebridgeteencenter.org](http://www.thebridgeteencenter.org).