

Orland Park teen center fun, safe, free



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The teenage years have never been easy ones, but these days, teenagers face unparalleled issues and choices every day.

The economic climate has created the need for more two-income families. There are also more single-parent households than ever before. This creates a home where teens spend more time alone and unsupervised, responsible for making decisions on their own.

At a time when society and the media promote unhealthy behaviors, a teenager is at a greater risk of making poor choices. Teenagers need somewhere to turn for guidance and advice, for kindness, friendship and love.

The Bridge Teen Center provides just that. It is the vision of Priscilla and Rob Steinmetz, an incredibly talented and passionate couple who have focused their lives on creating an educational, creative and fun place for teenagers to spend their time. Most importantly, it is a safe place.

Supervised by qualified adults, the Bridge is open during those

“alone” hours for teens — after school and before parents get home, when it’s just as easy to take part in bad behaviors as it is good ones.

Don’t get me wrong, we are surrounded with incredible kids, filled with talent, intelligence and enthusiasm. That is also why the Bridge is here.

The mission of the Bridge is to provide free programs in a safe environment where students can develop mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

The programs at the Bridge are professionally designed around the interests and needs of average suburban teenagers and are offered in five categories: everyday life, community connections, educational support, mind-body and expressive arts.

Programs are overseen by qualified adult volunteers and are free. In fact, everything offered at the Bridge is free. The only requirement is to fill out a membership application that can be kept on file.

There is quite an extensive selection of programs from which to choose — everything from homework help, creative journaling and music lessons to yoga, hip-hop dance and self-defense. There is also a wide variety of culinary demonstrations from many of our area’s chefs, many practical life-skills programs and opportunities to help on community projects.

In May 2011 the Bridge expand-



The Bridge Teen Center in Orland Park is a place where teens can get adult guidance and advice, especially after school. Its mission is to provide free programs in a safe environment where teens can develop mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally. | SUPPLIED PHOTO

ed to double the existing space. This allowed the Bridge to not only accommodate the growing number of teens coming in, but to create an incredibly cool space referred to as “the Garage.”

The Garage is the official music venue of the Bridge Teen Center. With a full-sized stage, speaker system and dance floor, this is like no other teen center you’ve ever seen. Live entertainment is offered

every Friday night. There are also open-mike and improv nights. The Bridge offers guitar, drum and keyboard lessons and is creating a space for a recording studio.

As amazing a place as the Bridge is for teens, Priscilla and Rob haven’t forgotten about the parents. Monthly parent programs are offered on a variety of topical subjects to help adults understand and communicate with their teens.

They also offer parent referrals and a database of resources, all designed to enhance and strengthen family life at home.

Everything about the Bridge Teen Center has been designed with purpose. From the physical building to the programs, Priscilla and Rob Steinmetz have gone to great lengths to find the resources to create this special place.

“It is not a job; it is a calling,” said Priscilla. “It is passion driven with a purpose.”

Priscilla was recently selected one of 20 Afterschool Ambassadors nationwide by the After-school Alliance. Besides running the Bridge, her roles will include organizing public events, communicating with policy makers and building support for afterschool programs. You only have to meet Priscilla once to know that she has found her calling. Her dynamic energy, along with her husband Rob, has built the foundation for the Bridge.

Their efforts, along with the generosity of countless volunteers, have created an environment that will make an immeasurable difference in so many lives.

The Bridge Teen Center is at 15555 S. 71st Court in Orland Park. It is for teens age 13 to 18. They are always looking for volunteers. Please visit their website to see all that the Bridge has to offer at www.thebridgecenter.org or phone (708) 532-0500.