

# Yorktown Teen Center Steps into Its Second Year



By Helena Rodriguez

Teens are adults in training. Their developmental need is to identify with others, gain experience and mastery. Teens want and need opportunities to learn, experience and connect. If we as a community do

And the time commitment! I work full time. Then the other me came out saying why not?

In June 2009, twelve adults worked together bringing their unique talents and wisdom to provide safe, supervised, positive, enriching and fun programs to teens. This new group was called Yorktown Teen Center, Inc. and I was "elected" president of the board. We formed a not-for-profit organization together from scratch with help along the way from various members of the community and town leaders. Space at the Yorktown Community and Cultural Center (YCCC) was rededicated to the teens by the town board.

This latest version of the Yorktown Teen Center puts Yorktown teens first on the agenda. Ideas for programs come after conversations with teens about their interests. Because of this our success was greater than expected.

We have had over 2,500 visits and more than 120 different teens walk through our doors this past year. Volunteers from the community provide supervision during our operating hours. Attendance is highest at our First Fridays Café Open Mic Night, which is co-sponsored by the Justin Veatch Fund. Teen performers entertain the audience with original

music and songs in a room on the ground floor of the YCCC that is decorated to look like CBGB's in Manhattan.

We also have the gym open on Friday nights, where basketball, ultimate Frisbee and dodge ball are the main sports. We have had a variety of basketball tournaments. The Harrison Apar Video and Technology Club meet on Thursdays. Members keep busy at the computer, editing their work with use of the other equipment donated by the Harrison Apar Field of Dreams Foundation. Their videos can be seen on Youtube.

The center was opened two days a week this summer. We did not expect high attendance as teens would be traveling or at camp. We were wrong, daily attendance was higher in the summer than during the school year. Teens came to play in the gym despite the oppressive heat. Between games they went to the teen lounge to cool off with a round of Scategories, a game of pool or time on the computer. We had a college intern and two teen volunteers help out tremendously. Our summer ended on a high note with a trip to Citi Field to see the Mets win against Houston. Tickets to the game were donated by the Mets.

In a few days we will be starting our second year. We have spent the summer

planning and scheduling. Plans include a chess club, decoupage classes for teens and their parents and 2011 Next Gen Arts Festival where teens will have the opportunity to display their talents in fine arts, video, photography, poetry and music various venues in Yorktown. Visit our website [www.yorktowntc.org](http://www.yorktowntc.org) for details and a calendar of events.

On October 16 the Yorktown Teen Center will be celebrating its first anniversary with a fundraising dinner. The dinner is open to all by advance reservation. The cocktail reception, which begins at 7 p.m., is followed by dinner, an award presentation, a keynote speaker and live band music. The money raised will go towards our operating expenses.

It takes funds to operate, even with 100 percent volunteers. We have sought private and public grants, but unfortunately we are too young as an organization to apply for most.

Does the Yorktown community want a teen center? We need your help and support! Yorktown teens need your time, time, and talents!

Help us help the future leaders of the community.

*Helena Rodriguez is president of the Yorktown Teen Center.*

## Guest Commentary