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## Teen center planned for Camco library

By JANE ROH  
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Hey, teenagers: Camden County librarians really want to hang with you.

Construction has begun on a 1,245-square-foot teen center at the M. Allen Vogelsson Branch Library in Voorhees. The recreation room-like space, to be dubbed The Corner, will be filled with dorm-style furniture, "graffiti" walls for artwork, a 52-inch plasma TV and video game area, and a performance stage, not to mention books.

"Teens are a group that is traditionally not coming into the library as often as other groups," said Linda Devlin, director of the Camden County Library System. "We hope that the center will attract new teens who will come in and use our resources."

The library system in January received \$40,000 in funding from the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative to build the center. Including matching funds from the Camden County Library System, a total of \$138,700 is being spent on the project.

Bach Associates of Haddon Heights designed the space, which is scheduled to open on Nov. 15, Devlin said.

At a meeting of the Vogelsson branch's Teen Advisory Board, or TAB, on Thursday, about a dozen members of the targeted demographic were excited over the new center.

"I've been looking forward to it for at least a year now," said Shivun Bhuta, an eighth-grader at Voorhees Middle School. "It's going to be a big improvement."

The students were enthused about the gaming center, but said that wasn't the draw to the Vogelsson branch.

"I joined because I enjoy volunteering at the library," said Ariel Golley, who helps sort books after school.

She and others agreed with the library's premise that the new center would lure kids who would otherwise stay away.

"None of my friends are involved right now and I constantly am trying to persuade them to go, said Golley, a Clementon Elementary seventh-grader.

"I think it would change their mind about the library a lot," echoed Simone Books, a Voorhees sixth-grader.

While the purpose a video game center serves in a public library might not be immediately apparent, Devlin said the new space will encourage teens to be creative and collaborate with one another.

"This is a great opportunity to (provide) one dedicated space for them, a place for them to come relate with other teens their own age and to be able to have the collections and the programs that they want and that they enjoy in one place," she said.

Teen-targeted books and graphic novels will line the shelves. Exposed concrete and brick work will

give the space "an urban feel," Devlin said, complete with galvanized light fixtures. The library will sponsor poetry slams and music performances at the stage area, and teen artwork will be displayed. The center, to be dubbed The Corner, will boast a cafe with booths, dorm-style wedge seating and beanbags, and a gaming area with a Nintendo Wii, GameCube, several PlayStation 2s and possibly an Xbox 360. The six computers will be outfitted with Ready Animator, a movie and cartoon-making software.

But some parents questioned the need for a tricked-out playroom in a building that's traditionally been aligned with academics and research.

"When we send our children to the library to study we don't necessarily want them to play on the Wii," said Priscilla Mahon, president of a fundraising group that stopped being affiliated with the Camden County Library System in August.

But Lauren Wiley, an English teacher from Somerdale, who was visiting the Vogelson branch with her three young children, dismissed those concerns.

"It's a good outlet for kids, especially because it's monitored," she said, adding that underprivileged students would be particularly served.

The Corner will be open during normal library hours and young people ages 11 through 18 are welcome, no library card necessary.

The TAB kids insisted that homework and socializing, not Mario Galaxy, would continue to be the main purpose of their visits.

"I play my Wii constantly" admitted Golley. But, she declared, as if to assure a skeptical parent, "I already finished my homework ages ago."

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