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Teens get their own space at Voorhees library

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Beneath a chain-link fence hanging on a wall and urban street lights, teens flooded Wednesday into The Corner -- a new 1,245-square-foot space in the M. Allan Vogelsson Regional Branch Library.

The center, designed for patrons between the ages of 12 and 18, was more than a year in the making. Jennifer Druce, youth services manager at the library, said she wanted to create a space that would draw in more teens.

"We had a few computers and a nice collection of books, but we didn't have anywhere for the teens to sit around and talk," Druce said. "Now we have diner-style booths for them to use, a 52-inch flat-screen TV and even a small stage."

The space was funded in part by a \$40,000 grant awarded by the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative and the New Jersey State Library. The Camden County Library System provided the rest of the funds.

Mark Amorosi, public relations director for the library, said the entire space cost about \$138,000 to create. The space, which is a separate room in the back corner of the library, features amenities that are brand new to the library.

"One of the things I'm most excited about is the graffiti wall," said Christen Orbanus, teen librarian. "It's basically like a big chalkboard where the teens can draw whatever they want on it."

The Corner also features six new computers with animation software, various video game systems, including Nintendo Wii, and a stage for upcoming performances.

Orbanus said she plans to host open mic nights and possibly a battle of the bands event in the future, something the library previously didn't have the space to do.

"I'm flabbergasted," said Hannah Pike, a 16-year-old from Voorhees and a member of the library's Teen Advisory Board. "I'm excited about using the animation equipment. I've always wanted to try, but I don't have programs I need."

The new computers all face a wall of windows in the urban-style room. Colorful computer desks, red diner booths and sleek black lounge chairs add to the relaxed atmosphere, Orbanus said.

By creating a space for young people, the library was also able to round up a collection of popular teen books, anime and graphic novels. Before, the books were scattered across the library instead of being housed in one place.

Juwan Cook, 16, a member of the Teen Advisory Board, said he visits the library at least once a week.

"It's better than I expected," said Cook, of Lawnside. "I like the (Nintendo) Wii and the fact that all of the books are in one place now. I think once other people see the space, more teens are going to want to come to the library."

During the debut of The Corner, retired judge M. Allan Vogelsson, the library's namesake, stopped by to

congratulate the teens and explain why the new space is so significant.

"Dream, explore and imagine," said Vogelsson, reciting the library system's motto. "You can't comprehend what those words mean to a kid from the projects. I got out of the projects because of books, it's as simple as that."

The library is one of two in New Jersey to receive the A+ Teen Space Project grant. The Atlantic City Public Library was also awarded the grant to create a teen space, Druce said.

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