Supporters of teen center thinking positive

By Pamela Powers
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — It isn't scheduled to open until next March, but a teen center for Menomonie middle and high school students would provide them with needed structure, positive activities, organizers of the effort say.

UW-Stout Optimist Club members are trying to find a place for the center. Sites on South Broadway Street and Main Street are being considered.

"Everyone says there is nothing to do in Menomonie, especially for high school students," said Chad Biggers, a member of the Optimist Club.

Teen center backers hope to change that. The center would include such items as game consoles, a television, a basketball hoop, pool tables and air hockey tables.

The center would provide a safe, positive place for teens to socialize or just relax, organizers said.

"It's a place for them to relax and hang out in an environment that is safe where parents know they are safe," said Biggers, 25, a junior at UW-Stout majoring in business administration with an emphasis in management of nonprofit agencies.

Madison Medenwaldt, 21, a member of the Optimist Club, agreed.

"It is a place kids can have fun without getting in trouble," said the UW-Stout junior majoring in human development and family studies. Snacks would be available at cost.

The teen center could help students connect with tutors if they need help studying or understanding a class. The center also would provide space where teen clubs could meet.

The goal is to have the teen center, which has been named The Optimist Center, run by college volunteers.
"In a college town, we see as one of our strengths ... a rollover of students every four years who need volunteer work," Medenwaldt said.

The teen center will not be highly structured, and no fees will be charged to attend.

"Kids can do whatever they want as long as they are not getting into trouble or breaking the rules," Biggers said.

The center may offer some teens a comfortable, safe alternative to their homes, Medenwaldt said. Center workers could connect teens to needed services in times of crisis or give them a safe place to stay.

Organizers hope to operate the center seven days a week. The center would be open during late afternoons and evenings during the week as well as on Saturdays and Sundays. Hours could be expanded during students' breaks from school.

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**To Help**

The UW-Stout Optimist Club is seeking donations to help open and operate a teen center in Menomonie. Expenses are estimated at $25,000 annually. To get involved or to make a donation, contact Optimist Club member Chad Biggers at BiggersC@my.uwstout.edu or 715-523-1776; or Madison Medenwaldt at MedenwaldtM@my.uwstout.edu or 715-773-0521.