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Teen center soft open goes well

By Sora O'Doherty



Sarah Aoki, right, passes out flyers for the new Teen Center. Photo Sora O'Doherty

A somewhat surprised Recreation Coordinator Jackson Stearns watched teens chatting on soft furnishings, playing pool, foosball and video games on the first open day of the new Orinda teen center, located in the same space that earlier in the day hosts Kindergym. "I guess it is a case of 'If you build it, they will come,'" he mused. The project had been a long-term goal of the Orinda Teen Advisory Council.

As Miramonte High School students got off County Connection buses at the Orinda Library stop, they were met by OTAC member Sarah Aoki with flyers advertising the new teen center. And apparently the effort paid off, because soon the center was busy with teens lounging on the large bean bag chairs, playing various games, or just relaxing and chatting. Some brought in food, others availed of the snacks and drinks provided by the center.

Stearns said that OTAC has been around for about 30 years and consists of middle and high school students interested in city government. About 10 years ago, OTAC

came close to opening a teen center in a building near Café Europa, according to Stearns. When he started working for Orinda in 2017, Stearns found the project, dusted it off and revived it. Over the summer he met with City Manager Steve Salomon, who agreed with the project, but pointed out that there wasn't much funding available.

As part of the Community Park remodel, the space that had been exclusively used by Kindergym is now a multi-purpose center being shared by several groups. Stearns has obtained supplies and equipment to create a place for students from middle school and high school to hang out after school.

The center will be open from Monday through Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. for now, until the level of interest can be evaluated. There will be adult supervision daily; either Stearns or another staff member will be present.

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