

## Open a Teen Center Downtown

Ninth graders get stuck in the middle. We're not kids, but we're still too young to drive. After school, juniors and seniors drive places to meet friends and have fun. We're stuck finding places within walking distance from the high school, or places we can get to on public transportation. Last week, Mayor Steve Ricchio recommended to the common council that it should "seriously consider an after-school program for students at Pine Ridge High." He's right! It's time for a teen center downtown where kids can go after school.

First of all, a downtown teen center would be most convenient. About a third of Pine Ridge students head downtown after school because it's so close to the high school. A teen center downtown would be easy for us to get to. It would also be near the public library, so if we wanted to study with our friends at the teen center, we could get study materials from the library first. Best of all, all city buses stop downtown at the Transit Center, so we would have a way to get home without calling our folks to come and get us.

A downtown teen center would help the relationship between all teens and downtown store owners. Many times, it's cold or rainy outside, so kids hang out in the stores. Store owners don't like this. They either don't let us in at all, or we can only come in two at a time. A teen center would get kids out of the stores and into a place that's better for meeting with friends. That would make both the store owners and us happy.

The most important reason for a downtown teen center is to have a definite place to go after school. Right now, kids hang out on street corners, in coffee shops, and at the park. There isn't much to do in those places, so it's easy to get bored. A teen center would provide a safe place where we could listen to music, dance, play games, and have fun with our friends.

The adults in our town believe that teens are troublemakers. In a recent letter to the local newspaper, one adult wrote, "If we provide a place for teens to congregate downtown, there will be nothing but trouble. Downtown will become a dangerous place, and more people will go to the suburbs to shop." This person couldn't be more wrong! A few kids cause trouble, but most kids just want a safe place to study with friends, learn new things, and just have fun.

A downtown teen center is a great idea! It would be easy for us to get to, and it's near places we need to go, like the library. It would get us out of stores and create a place where we can get together and have fun. Best of all, it would help the people of our town see that we are good, law-abiding citizens.