

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY

# Refurbished teen center to hold open house

*The Valley Youth Center came about because of the beating death of teenager Eddie Polec in 1994. An open house is set for tonight.*

BY JAMES E. STANTON  
*The Intelligencer*

It was an idea whose time had come.

More than 10 years ago, the Gloria Dei Church in Huntingdon Valley proposed setting up a teen center where youths could find a safe haven to work off their energy.

However, as resident Mark Bellomo recalls, plans began to lag.

"No one wanted to take leadership," he said Thursday.

Several months later, in November 1994, a teen gang from the suburbs fatally beat a 16-year-old youth from the nearby Fox Chase section of Philadelphia.

Eddie Polec was beaten,

sometimes with bats, on the steps of the Roman Catholic church he attended.

"Once that happened, we felt we had to do something," Bellomo, a plumbing contractor, recalled.

"To me, it was the driving force to find a center."

The Lower Moreland commissioners offered space in the lower level of the Huntingdon Valley Library on Red Lion Road.

"(The space) was big and

ugly, a dungeon-type place," said Bellomo, now president of the facility called the Valley Youth Center.

Within the space of two years, Bellomo, some other contractors and members of the community donated time and materials to transform the space into a recreation center.

He said the center can accommodate up to 100 youngsters when special events are held.

The center is not only used by those in their pre-teens and early teens, but also adult com-

munity groups.

Tonight, the center will have passed another milestone — a renovation.

After two months of work, the center will hold an open house, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Denise Kuritz, a township commissioner and a community activist, said that nearly nine years of activity had left the center "pretty well beaten up."

Kuritz, the center's vice president, said that, since the center is nonprofit, fund-raising events, such as "beef and beverage nights" are held.

She said that at the open house, state Sen. Stewart Greenleaf, R-12, and state Rep. Sue Cornell, R-152, are expected to announce that the center will soon get some state grants.

"I'm sure visitors will be pleased once they see what the renovations have accomplished," Kuritz said.

A Halloween party will be held Saturday night for children in grades four through six, she said.

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