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In a short period of time, the Poinciana Teen Center blossoms into a popular spot.

November 4th, 2011 Michael Freeman



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<content/uploads/2011/11/teen-center.jpg>

Augustus Omolara, the program assistant at the Poinciana Teen Center, says it becomes a crowded place by 5 p.m . weekdays. (Photo by Michael Freeman).

POINCIANA – Glancing around, Opal Warren shakes her head.

There's a computer lab – *good*. There's a lounge where students can relax, play some pool, or do some homework – also good.

Warren, though, is nothing if not ambitious.

"We need a gym," she said. "We need everyone who has the best interests of the kids in the community to rally for us."

Less than four months since the Boys & Girls Club Poinciana Teen Center first opened its doors, Warren, the center's service director, remains ambitious about the future. It's a great start, she said, to have a place where teens between the ages of 10 and 18 can meet, relax, hang out together, do their homework, and use a computer. It was something Poinciana badly needed, she said.

But it's never too early to start thinking about a possible expansion, Warren added.

"We have a basketball hoop, and the kids love it," Warren said, adding that a gym where they could work out, exercise, and stay physically fit would also be a welcome addition to the Teen Center.

It wouldn't be inexpensive to build, but maybe the community would rally behind the idea, she added.

“We can appeal to the community and say ‘Give us a gym, help us out,’ “ Warren said.

They may have a chance to do that next month, on Dec. 10, when Poinciana holds its annual Christmas Parade at 10 a.m. Warren hopes to show the community just how impressive the Teen Center is, through the students who regularly go there.

Warren recently heard the song “Poinciana,” written by Henry Bernier and Nat Simon, which was first used in the 1952 film “Dreamboat” and then again in the 1995 movie “The Bridges of Madison County.” It’s become a standard, and when Warren discovered it, she knew it could be used to promote pride among the teens in this fast-growing community. Poinciana’s 10 villages are spread out across Osceola and Polk counties, and have grown to more than 84,000 residents.

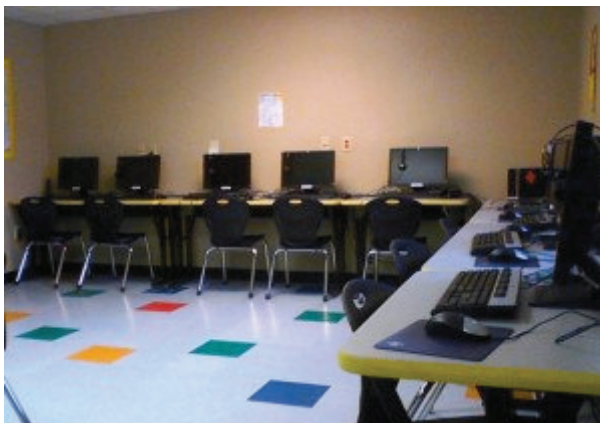
“I heard the lyrics of the song, and heard the melody behind it, and thought, ‘Wow, that would be such a great thing to teach them,’ “ she said. “No one knows what Poinciana is, but now we know – it’s a tree. We’re having a Christmas parade in Poinciana, and we want to enter that as our homage to the community. That is our song, and maybe that will make the kids even more proud of their community.”

The teens who regularly attend the Teen Center at 2190 S. Marigold Ave. will enter a float in the parade, and the teens have been learning the song “Poinciana,” and will perform it as they follow the parade route.

“We will have a float with the kids on it, singing the song,” Warren said. “Some kids are going to be playing the drums to it.”

Under Warren’s direction, the Teen Center has tried to stay active these past few months, by introducing special events to bring in even more kids.

“Last week we had our Hispanic Heritage Month activity,” she said. “Students had to research the first Hispanic American who did a variety of things ... military, sports, film, medicine, and so on. The kids were just fabulous. They were just so enthusiastic about knowing this – ‘Oh, this was the first Hispanic American to do this!’ It was wonderful.”



<http://freelinemediaorlando.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/teen-center-computer-lab.jpg>

The Poinciana Teen Center on Marigold Avenue has a computer lab for teens to use. (Photo by Michael Freeman).

The Teen Center also tries to develop programs that help the teens mature on the sometimes rocky road to adulthood, said Augustus Omolara, the center’s program assistant.

“We have tutorials going on,” he said. “We have special programs we run here.”

The programs have gotten so popular, he said, that by the time schools get out by late afternoon, the center gets crowded, he added.

“By 5 o’clock, everyone will be here,” he said.

Part of their mission, he said, is to work with the teens as they approach adulthood.

“We have a program called Passport to Manhood,” he said. “I work with the boys to teach them to stay in school and stay away from drugs.”

The teens have enjoyed having this center, he said, as a spot where they can hang out, be among friends, and enjoy one another’s company.

“It’s a good thing,” he said, “for kids to be able to come here.”

To learn more, call 863-496-4450.

Contact us at FreelineOrlando@Gmail.com.

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