

New Management Could Re-Open Teen Center

by Brigit Holt

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ALTON - When the Riverbender Community Center closed last May, John Hentrich and his board of directors had the end goal of finding an entity or individual who would re-open the center under new management.

For more than 10 years, the center had served thousands of teens and provided programs and meeting spaces for people of all ages from toddlers to seniors. The center focused primarily on middle schoolers, for whom the center was designed, to provide safe, fun

recreation away from the lure of negative influences like alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. While Hentrich and his board had run a very successful operation, they were ready for someone else to take the reins.

A year ago, Brigit Holt moved from Chicago to Alton with her middle-school son who discovered the Riverbender Center and really enjoyed the Friday night parties.

“I learned the hard way that tickets to the parties sold out pretty quickly,” said Holt. “My son was really disappointed one week when I didn’t order his ticket fast enough, so he didn’t get to attend the party that Friday night.”

When it appeared to Holt that no one else had signed on to re-open the center, she met with Hentrich and told him of her desire to help open the center again.

“I am working hard to re-open the center,” Holt said, “but I can’t do it alone. I've started a [Facebook group](#) to find other moms (and dads) who are also missing the community center and want to help me get it re-opened. I have a goal to have a strong opening with a New Year’s Eve Party on December 30th for middle schoolers and we need a minimum of \$6,000.00 to meet the financial requirements to re-open the Center.”

Holt is asking for people to join her Facebook group "[Re-Open The Riverbender Community Center](#)" and also asking for donations on this Giving Tuesday.

Donations can be made to Riverbender Community Center, 200 W, Third Street, Alton, IL 62002, or online at <https://riverbendercommunitycenter.org/donate>. Donations will be used to help with rent, insurance, and other startup costs associated with opening under a new name and under new management.



Holt says she is anxious to carry out the programs that have been so successful.

“Riverbender.com Community Center is an enormous asset to this community, and I can’t wait to open the doors to our youngsters and adults so that its unique and numerous qualities can once again be enjoyed,” she said. “So, I’m sending out a request for volunteers and monetary donations. November 22 starts Giving Tuesday, and I welcome any and all contributions, small and large, to help me re-open the Riverbender.com Community Center.”

Holt came to Alton having spent a lifetime around recreation and community centers. Her father, Dr. Terry Schwartz, started his career as Superintendent of Recreation in Alton and moved on to run and manage parks and recreation in San Francisco, California, and the Illinois communities of Winnetka, Glen Ellyn, Champaign, and Arlington Heights.

“I started visiting community centers when I was six months old and I’ve visited more community centers than I can remember,” said Holt, “but I had never seen anything that came close to rivaling the Riverbender.com Community Center.”

Previous to moving to her parents’ hometown of Alton, Holt, with degrees in Family and Environmental Studies, had found her niche when she landed the position of Head Co-ordinator of the University of Illinois’ Master Naturalist program for Cook County,

Illinois. “I created programs for multiple sites throughout the county,” Holt said, “including the forest preserves consisting of over 70,000 acres.” Holt also oversaw the training and coordination of a large squad of volunteers.

“I come by it naturally,” said Holt. “My dad has spent his career either directing park districts, or teaching parks, recreation, sport management, and tourism at universities. And my grandfather was Bill Parker who played a big role in the development of Moore Park, and he worked on getting ball diamonds built along Alton’s riverfront. I guess it was a given that my sister, Meredith, and I would both end up working in recreation programming,” she said.

“You can’t let a gem like this sit empty,” said Holt. “I look forward to putting my background to use, and I can’t wait to get folks into the building again to enjoy what John Hentrich and his board created. It’s an outstanding asset, and it needs to be full of people enjoying all that it has to offer.”