

iMerge Community Center Introduces New Classes, eSports Gaming, Upcoming Events

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - As winter continues, iMerge Community Center encourages people to come out and enjoy their various classes and open play nights.

Located at 200 W. 3rd Street in Alton, iMerge offers open play nights from 6:30–10 p.m. every Friday night. Kids in fifth through eighth grade can come play for \$12. The center also recently introduced classes for all ages, including dance and chocolatiering classes, and they are planning to start an eSports team for kids to compete with other clubs throughout the area.

“It’s a community center, and so we would really like to share it with the community,” said Brigit Holt, iMerge executive director. “keeping in the spirit of a safe space for children, but it’s such a great space. We really think that the whole community should be able to utilize it.”

Holt explained that the open play nights encourage kids to get out of the house and spend time together. The center has a rock-climbing wall, karaoke, video games and arcade games like skee ball. Kids from different school districts around the Riverbend come out every Friday to play, and there is usually a different theme every week to add to the fun.

While parents are welcome to drop off their kids for the night, Holt asks that they consider volunteering as chaperones. If you chaperone, one of your children can play for free for the night. Parents are also invited to tour the space or reach out to Holt with any questions.

“In an effort to keep everyone safe, obviously we need lots of chaperones, so please come,” Holt added. “This has been a weird year in Alton with all the stuff going on at the beginning of the year at the high school, and I think a lot of parents don’t feel safe with the kids being out in the community. So that’s very unfortunate, but we’ve maintained a safe space for the kiddos to hang out and that’s what it’s for.”

The open play nights are a staple at iMerge, but the center also recently started offering dance classes for all ages from 6:30–7:30 p.m. on Thursday nights. Holt will host chocolatiering classes starting in February, and she wants more people to share their skills with the community through the center.

“We have a lot of space and a lot of resources in the building that can be used for all sorts of fun stuff,” Holt said. “I’d like to add that if there are other community members who have skills that they would like to share with other community members, I hope they would feel free to approach me and ask if we can facilitate those kinds of activities, because we’re a community center and we’d really like for the community to engage and for some people to share their skills and others to learn from them.”

As the center grows, they’re looking for more ways to serve the community. Holt said they are planning to start an afterschool eSports program for upper elementary schoolers

through high schoolers. iMerge will host an open house from 1–4 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 21, 2024, for parents and kids to come and learn more about the eSports program. For more information, visit the [official Facebook event page](#).

iMerge also hopes to have more events and will host the band [Miles Station](#) on March 30, 2024. The bar and kitchen will be open and you can [buy tickets online](#) for \$20. Check out the [iMerge Community Center Facebook page](#) or their [official website](#) for updates as they prepare for more events like this in the next few months.

Ultimately, Holt said, the goal is to get more people in the center and engaged with the community. They need additional volunteers to help in the kitchen and repair equipment for open play nights. If you have questions about iMerge Community Center, or if you want to volunteer, rent the space for a party or teach a class at iMerge, contact Holt at 618-433-8997 or brigit@imergecommunitycenter.org.

“Everybody’s on their phones and playing video games. At least can do it together here,” she laughed. “Especially after COVID, COVID had us all go into our little separate corners there for a while and I think it’s been hard, actually, to get people in the community to want to spend time together again after that. Everybody’s really comfortable in their houses. So allowing them to have some space and some fun things to do in a safe space, I think it’s really important to our community.”



iMERGE

COMMUNITY CENTER

GAMING CLUB

OPEN HOUSE!!

SUNDAY, JANUARY 21

**1-4PM
ALL AGES
FREE!**

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GET INFORMATION ABOUT OUR CLUBS!
PRESENTATIONS ABOUT GAMING!
MOVIES!
COMPETITIONS!
AND MORE!!**

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