

Teen center not a budget-buster for GapBuster

■ After-school program gets new space with convenient location all for \$1 a year

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

For the cost of \$1, nonprofit organization GapBuster Learning Center has rented its first building since Yvette Butler founded the after-school program in 1999.

The organization works with area

youths to provide academic support. Academic operations, including tutoring, peer mentoring and SAT prep, will take place at the new teen center in downtown Silver Spring, 8216 Georgia Ave.

The Silver Spring center will replace GapBuster's Bethesda headquarters.

Lauren Whitaker, a sophomore GapBuster member attending Paint Branch High School, said the new location was central for most members. "I think it's really convenient for everyone."

According to Butler, the organization has a 10-year agreement from Ridley Realty to lease the building, which used to be a pool hall. GapBuster has a 10-year agreement to pay \$1 annually, plus utilities and taxes.

For the past few weeks, students have been helping to clean and renovate the space. The place was in poor condition, Butler said, but she and the kids were "able to see the possibilities" of expanded programming they could accomplish there.

For example, the center plans to

house a library for youngsters who do not own many books, Butler said, hoping that this center will be a place where they can "cuddle up and read."

Camille Meeks, a senior attending Montgomery Blair High School and current secretary of GapBuster's Leaders In Training program, talked about the social advantages. "We can do whatever we want there. We could have parties, we could have some type of fund-raisers," she said.

GapBuster's first fund-raiser, coupled with a Halloween party, will take place Oct. 28. "The fund-raiser we're

having is to recondition our new space that we have," Meeks said. Those who attend will be expected to bring canned foods to be donated to charity.

Other outreach initiatives include environmental advocacy and teaching Montgomery County residents about AIDS, said Malcolm Clyburn, a sophomore attending Springbrook High School and the organization's first vice president.

Clyburn hopes a community center will attract members to "hang out and get off the streets."

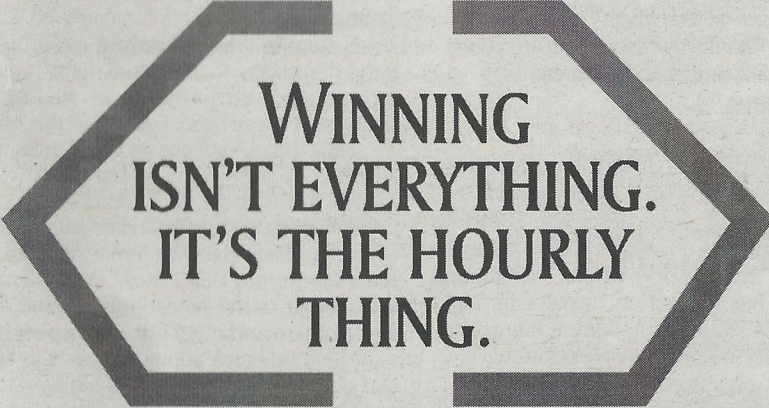
"We were having a lot of trouble getting places where we could meet and now we have one," Whitaker said, adding that they "can get a lot more things done that way."

Butler, a Silver Spring resident, stressed GapBuster's belief that the average youth wants to "help other students their age understand the importance of academics," especially for minority students.

The students have put together a \$20,000 grant request from Montgomery County, outlining their ambitions. The request lists around eight items, including math workshops and peer mentoring between high schoolers and middle schoolers.

Students are planning several events, including sleepovers, open mike nights and movie events, according to Butler.

The youths also will decide on a more official name for the center, Butler said.



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