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## **PIA leaders urge Mtn. View mayor to build teen center**

On May 14, over 200 parishioners of St. Joseph and St. Athanasius parishes in Mountain View united to petition Mayor Tom Means to begin the process to build a teen center by allocating funds in the June 2008-2009 budget.

PIA (Peninsula Interfaith Action) sponsored the meeting, held at St. Joseph Church, and PIA leaders have stated that without the youth alternatives and programs provided by the teen center, violence and gang involvement of young people in Mountain View could continue.

Edwin Zuniga, 14, said, "A year ago, I was wearing red and I thought I found friendship in the gangs. I saw friends beaten up and I knew I didn't want that, but I couldn't see a way out.

"If I hadn't found YMAI (Youth Motivated for Action and Involvement), I would surely still be there," said Zuniga, a YMAI leader. "Violence will continue unless we teens in Mountain View have a safe, fun, stable place to hang out."

At the May 14 meeting, YMAI and PIA joined forces to present a detailed proposal for the construction of a teen center. Last year, the mayor made a commitment in front of 300 people that he would support a teen center.

Since then, PIA leaders conducted a needs assessment which revealed that programs for teens ages 13 to 18 years are not only inadequate and unattractive, but not accessible to everyone. Results of surveys showed that a stable environment where teens can have a computer room, lounge, events and counseling services all in one place is essential. Community leaders created concepts for such a center which they presented at the meeting.

The presentation included potential locations and funding sources. Youth and their parents also shared their experiences growing up in a city with rising gang violence.

"I can't keep my son indoors every minute and each time he goes outside with his friends I worry that they are not in a safe place," said Cristina Corona, a PIA leader.

"We know that there are funds to create a teen center in Mountain View and we will not stop until the city makes our youth the priority," said Jose Carrillo, a leader for 17 years at St. Athanasius Parish and also a PIA leader.

Also present for the meeting, besides Mayor Means, were Councilmember Ronit Bryant and Chief of Police Scott Vermeer.

PIA is a federation of 30 diverse congregations, representing 20,000 families on the San Francisco Peninsula and northern Santa Clara County working to improve their community.