'Lighthouse' gives teens alternative to parking lots

By BOBBY BURNS
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WILLIAMSTON — A pair of Williamston youth ministers, tired of hearing that Martin County teens have nothing to do outside school, on New Year's Eve will open a teen hang out that's guaranteed to give them an alternative.

The Lighthouse will open with a bang downtown at 8 p.m. Wednesday with help from Christian recording artists Sonstruk. Any teen from 12 to 18 is welcome to attend the opening, which will include dancing, games and plenty of loud, modern music, said organizers Geoff Baggett and Trey Ledbetter.

The ministers started the club in the Woolard Furniture building with help from their congregations, individuals and local businesses. The idea is to turn kids on to contemporary Christian music — which runs the style gamut from rock to rap and pop — and provide a "wholesome," environment where kids can play foosball, have a soft drink and just hang out.

"We want to make it really cool, make it a place where they will want to come," Baggett said at the club last week. "Hopefully, it will give them an alternative to the parking lots, the drugs, partying all the time and the other places they have to go." Ledbetter, youth minister at West End Baptist, has wanted to do something like the Lighthouse since he came here about three years ago and experienced first hand the void of organized youth activities. Eventually he hooked up with Baggett, a minister at Memorial Baptist, and the two started formulating the idea last summer.

Things really came together when Pete and Gail White let them rent the old furniture store for cheap, and their congregations kicked in a lot of start up cash. Now, they have sound equipment, games like ping pong and foosball, a big screen television, a cafe, a dance floor and staging are for the shows.

The club will be open on Saturday nights from 7-11 p.m. and hours will likely expand as momentum builds. The ministers say they have rules, but with a laid-back approach, and they won't be "smacking kids over the heads with rules." Parents are invited to an open house Monday from 7-9 p.m.

"We will give them a wholesome environment where they can come, feel safe and enjoy themselves," Ledbetter said.