

SOUTHWEST VALLEY

Valley

[Southwest](#)Type Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

SouthWest Skills Center graduates largest class

by **Megan Gordon** - Jul. 3, 2009 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

One Southwest Valley [school](#) is thriving in the tough economy.

SouthWest Skill Center graduated its largest class last week, a trend that director Katie Brocker attributes partly to adults changing careers.

"Whether it's displaced workers coming in to retool . . . or (students) to do job readiness during their senior year," she said, "certainly the economy has contributed to some and probably the majority of it."

The school graduated 172 students in June, up from 156 in March.

Students can [graduate](#) three times a year: March, June and November. That's because the center provides fast-track job-skill training, Brocker said, mostly in health care. Classes are held on the Estrella Mountain [Community College](#) campus in Avondale.

Last week's milestone drew more than 1,000 friends and family members to a graduation ceremony at the Wigwam Golf Resort and Spa in Litchfield Park.

Melissa Hickson was one of the 97 students who participated in the completion ceremony. She also addressed the audience.

"It has been a truly unique experience to be in the company of such a diverse group of people," said Hickson, a Practical [Nurse Program](#) graduate. "The youngest in our class is 21. We also have . . . a longtime homemaker who is just beginning her first career . . . and some who are beginning their second career."

Many of the students cited cost and timing as reasons they enrolled at the skills center. Courses are more affordable than at community colleges, and many [evening classes](#) are available.

But the recession has some graduates anxious about finding a job.

Lomeina Faaniu, 35, who graduated as a practical nurse, hopes to eventually become a registered nurse and earn a [bachelor's degree](#).

"I'm hoping by the time I'm done with my RN (degree), the economy will turn around," the Goodyear resident said. "I'm not the only one worried. A lot of us are talking about it."

The SouthWest Skill Center started on the Estrella campus, 3000 N. Dysart Road, in 1999. For more information, visit www.estrellamountain.edu/swsc.

Type Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)



[Print](#)



[Email](#)



[Retweet](#)



SHARE



[Digg this](#)