

[Southwest](#)[Valley](#)Type Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)[Print](#)[Email](#)[Retweet](#)[Digg this](#)

Empowerment is the theme at Avondale's EMCC graduation

by **Eric Graf** - May. 15, 2009 03:55 PM
The Arizona Republic

Estrella Mountain Community College celebrated spring graduation on Friday, as the guest speakers of the ceremony urged the new graduates to continue challenging themselves.

The class of 2009 at EMCC, comprised of more than 400 students, earned a total of 543 degrees and 364 certificates at the graduation.

The event featured several speakers who touched on the day's theme, "Empowerment-Movement-Challenge-Change," and also included songs from two students.

Ernest Lara, president of the Avondale college, kicked off the ceremony, telling graduates to "be a catalyst for change."

"I know your journey to this may not have been easy," Lara said. "You should be proud. . . . Continue to empower yourself with knowledge."

Graduating student Jose Rios, 20, addressed his peers, reminding them of the hard work and discipline it took to achieve their goals at Estrella Mountain. Rios said before he enrolled at EMCC, he was unsure if college was right for him.

Now, the Buckeye resident plans to attend Arizona State University in the fall to continue his education.

"Three years ago, I was completely wrong about not being college material," Rios said. "I can go as far as I want to, and so can you."

Rios is a former English as a Second Language student who has been heavily involved with student life on campus. His passion for fashion even led school administrators to offer its first fashion courses next semester.

"The challenge is worth the outcome, as we proved here today," he said.

EMCC invited George Lee, chief operating officer of Kabuto Arizona Properties and a West Valley resident, to give the day's commencement address. He spoke of seeking diverse opinions, keeping an open mind and taking action.

"Some people fear change, some people relish change and some people effectuate change," Lee said. "In which category do you belong?"

He told graduates to follow their passion and to "be bold, be relevant and make a difference."

Later, during a reception for family and friends, graduates mingled with each other and talked about their plans.

Benjamin Smith, a 20-year-old Goodyear resident who graduated with an associate's degree in applied science, said he was going to start a business to provide servers to local companies.

"I'm a combination of relieved and apprehensive," he said. "I'm not sure what the future holds."

Pauline Hardcastle, 45, of Phoenix, echoed Smith's sentiments about the future, but also said she felt good about increasing her educational level.

"The job market is very competitive and knowledge is power. With the economy today, the more skill sets you have," she said, "the better position you will be in to farther in your career."

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



[Print](#)



[Email](#)



[Retweet](#)



[Digg this](#)