



May 2008

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Map Collection



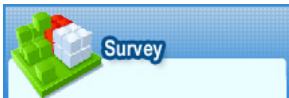
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- We don't need more or they're not worth it
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zzyy 05-01-09 EMCC commencement is May 15

EMCC commencement is May 15; see students' stories May 1, 2009

Estrella Mountain Community College will celebrate the academic accomplishments of its class of 2009 at its 13th annual commencement ceremony at 10 a.m. May 15 in the Image Zone (Southeast Lawn). The ceremony, themed, "Empowerment-Movement-Challenge-Change" recognizes the students receiving 543 degrees and 364 certificates in multiple disciplines.

The student-developed theme, "Empowerment-Movement-Challenge-Change" is representative of the college name (EMCC), the historical year this nation has had, and the things that students face while pursuing a higher education. Students are empowered to learn, motivated to cause movement, challenged to reach their goals, and ultimately are changed because of the experiences they've had. Estrella Mountain Community College students, as well as students graduating from other Maricopa Community Colleges, leave prepared to transfer to a four-year university or to begin their careers with skills obtained through occupational-specific programs. These achievements are recognized at the commencement ceremony.

This year's program will include a welcome by College President Dr. Ernest Lara followed by student speaker, Jose Rios; faculty comments by Dr. Rachel Smith, faculty senate president and biology faculty; a commencement address by George Lee, member of the Maricopa Community College Foundation Board and president and COO of Kabuto Properties, LLC; and student performances.

Jose Rios, Graduating Student and Commencement Speaker



When Jose Rios was growing up in his grandmother's bridal shop in California, watching her quickly create extravagant gowns, he knew certain things to be true: A career in fashion was all he could do, because he could never afford to go to college, and wouldn't be smart enough to make it there, even if he could. As Rios prepares to transfer to Arizona State University to complete his education after earning his EMCC degree, he is now certain that he was completely wrong.

Rios, the only son of a single mother, spent his high school years convinced that college was out of the picture. It was Rios' mother who encouraged him to consider community college as his entrée into higher education.

"I thought—I just have to get a job and go to work. No college for me. My mom changed all that," Rios said. "You can start at the community college, and we'll figure out a way to make ends meet," my mom told me. She pushed me to come to Estrella."

For Rios, the idea of going to college was scary, but the comforting and calming assistance of advisor Eva Cruz made a difference by explaining the financial aid and enrollment process. Rios soon found himself enrolled in a summer biology course.

"That was my mom's 'I told you so' moment," Rios said. That first class was fast paced, and challenging, but Rios made fast friends and soon found himself ingrained in the EMCC campus culture.

But fashion, his first love, still called to him. As he completed his general studies courses, as well as extended studies in communications, Rios founded the college's first Fashion Club, where he could combine his love of fashion and event coordination, as he coordinated, managed, and designed four fashion shows over the course of two years. As the club's head designer, Rios had the chance to share his knowledge and experience with other burgeoning designers, and groomed the club to be its own self sufficient entity. It will hold its first officer elections after his graduation. What's more, the college will offer its first courses in fashion in the fall 2009 semester, a legacy of which Rios is deeply proud.

As the college's student speaker, Rios looks back on his experiences with fondness, for the world that Estrella Mountain offers its students, within and beyond the classroom.

"I never actually want to leave Estrella," Rios said. "It is my home away from home. And that's what I would tell incoming students. Don't get overwhelmed. You can make it. With the support that is given here — you'll make it. Don't listen to the negatives other people throw around, to their failure stories.



Weather

Glendale, AZ

Max : 92°F
Min : 69°F
Five-day forecast

Currently : Partly Cloudy



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This is your story. Here at Estrella, they go above and beyond to help you with whatever you might need. Experience it for yourself."

For Rios, the May 15, 2009 graduation has added meaning. It would not be possible without that support and the faith his mother had in his abilities, and her belief in his dreams. "This degree is as much hers as it is mine."

Christopher Esteen, Graduating Student

The idea of college is just that to some, an idea. From financial difficulties to believing that higher education is out of reach, many young adults can't imagine achieving that dream with so many barriers standing in their way. Christopher Esteen was one of those.

"I thought college was just for the rich or athletic types," he said. But he and his older brother, Mark, planned to work together to achieve that goal, no matter their financial or athletic status. However, tragedy struck and altered that dream forever. A gang shootout in Esteen's neighborhood killed his older brother. Esteen gave up on attending college.

"When my brother died, I just wanted to get out of there," he said. Esteen packed up and moved from California to Arizona and began attending Arizona Automotive Institute. While it was an education, Esteen realized it wasn't what his brother had wanted him to achieve. After exploring community colleges in his area, Esteen chose to attend Glendale Community College in 2001, but "life struck," he said. His family grew to include five beautiful little girls, all under the age of 11. Esteen had to get a full-time job to support his family, and his college education took a back seat. But his brother's dream nagged at him, and Esteen was determined to make it work. He enrolled at Estrella Mountain Community College in 2006 and hasn't looked back.



Esteen immersed himself in studies and campus life. He participated in the Maricopa Community College District Student Conference, joined the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and became a student ambassador and mentor. He volunteered in the community all while continuing to work full-time. His extensive involvement on the college campus led to a great respect from his peers and college administration and earned him honors that would help him fulfill his goal of obtaining a degree from a state university.

In Spring 2009, Esteen was nominated to participate in the 2009 All-USA Academic Team for Community Colleges competition sponsored by Phi Theta Kappa, the international honors society for community colleges. Esteen was selected to the All-Arizona Academic First Team, which awarded him with a full, two-year tuition waiver to any of Arizona's three universities and an additional \$1,000 scholarship from Estrella Mountain Community College. He was also selected to the All-USA Academic Second Team, was awarded the Coca-Cola Foundation's Silver Scholar award, and was chosen as Estrella Mountain's first Guistewhite Scholarship winner – each award earning him additional scholarship dollars to fund his education.

"It just feels like a dream," he said about his accomplishments. "I never expected this much to come from what I've done. I put myself out there because I cared, and it just proves that if you're positive, you work hard, and if you stick to your goals, it will pay off in the end."

Esteen is graduating from Estrella Mountain Community College with an Associate of Business degree. He will transfer to Arizona State University and hopes to start a non-profit organization and own an advertising agency.

Estrella Mountain Community College is on Thomas and Dysart Roads in Avondale and offers transfer-ready academic courses and job-specific occupational training to approximately 13,000 students annually. Estrella Mountain is part of the Maricopa County Community College District, one of the largest community college districts in the nation. For more information visit www.estrellamountain.edu or www.maricopa.edu.

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