



# West Valley VIEW

The community newspaper of Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, Litchfield Park & Tolleson, AZ  
Phone (623) 535-8439

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## Express yourself

***Estrella Mountain Community College increases arts offerings***

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ELAINE ROBINSON, an art student at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale, displays "Tiny Students of EMCC," an art project focusing on scale and design and then placed around campus in obvious and not so obvious settings.

Have a song in your heart, a skip in your step or an eye for photography?

Creative minds need to look no further than their local college for an ever-growing array of creative arts classes.

Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale has been steadily increasing its course offerings in the arts. With a variety of dance forms, voice classes, painting, drawing, photography and storytelling, the college has something for all creative interests.

"The arts have always been very important to the college. What's really exciting right now is that we are seeing the breadth and depth of the offerings increase," said Joyce Jackson, dean of academic affairs.

The college offers 50 classes in the arts this semester and has 63 arts courses to choose from beginning in January 2010.

Tanisha Maxwell, a counseling faculty member, also teaches modern jazz at the college. Dance, music and arts classes are important for students pursuing careers in those fields, as well as enjoyable electives for anyone to tap into their creative side, she said.

"It allows students to have a creative outlet. Even for me with a counseling background, it serves as stress relief," she said. "It can serve as a retention tool. These type of classes can make a difference in students wanting to be here."

Popular television shows such as *So You Think You can Dance* and *Dancing with the Stars* have increased attention to various dance styles and drawn the interest of students.

"Definitely there's more of an interest out there. These dance shows are having an effect," Maxwell said.

While some students are seeking careers in the arts, introductory classes in subjects such as dance or photography are of broad interest, Maxwell said.

"It's fun. It's something I've done for years and enjoy doing," she said.

As the course offerings have increased at the college, enrollment in them has followed suit. Participation in arts classes has increased by about 14 percent each year.

"We have around 800 students participating in our arts courses now," Jackson said. "We really utilize art's ability to promote cross-cultural education. That has really been a commitment of the college."

## **A full-time commitment**

Jim Fike knows the college's dedication to the arts firsthand. In fact, his very job is testament to the school's focus.

"I'm the first full-time art professor here," Fike said. "Enrollment is up and classes are filling."

Fike currently teaches drawing, two-dimensional design and photography. He came to the college from Alabama with a master's degree in fine arts.

"Next semester, we are really offering some new things," he said. "I am bringing a contemporary approach."

During the upcoming spring semester, Fike will teach three-dimensional design, figure drawing and digital photography.

Maxwell is pleased to see the campus adapt with the growing interests of its students, she said.

"Hopefully as the campus grows and the area grows, we can be responsive and see what the demand is and meet that," she said.

The college has a lot of art exhibition space for public viewing.

"We bring in very diverse traveling exhibitions and do large shows of student work," Jackson said. "Art is also used to draw attention to social issues and sustainability, which has been a big focus on the campus."

An emphasis on the arts brings a special component to the college, its students and the community, Fike said.

"It adds a vital cultural component to the college," he said. "It enriches the experience for everyone."

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