



# West Valley VIEW

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

Tuesday, September 29, 2009

## **Where high school meets college**

***Arts council's land in escrow for sale to charter school district***

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A new concept in education is headed to the West Valley.

The 12-year-old Arizona Agribusiness and Equine Center District plans to open a college preparatory high school next to Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

The district operates charter public schools at three other community colleges - Mesa, South Mountain and Paradise Valley.

"Our next major expansion is to the West Valley," Superintendent William Torres Conley said.

A.A.E.C. is in the process of purchasing land on the northeast end of Estrella Mountain Community College, on Dysart Road, north of Thomas Road. The land is owned by the West Valley Arts Council, which no longer plans to build a facility at that location.

"We have been contacted by the West Valley Arts Council about the potential sale of land to the Arizona Agribusiness and Equine Center. Students and our community would benefit from this center as part of our campus, as it is a successful partnership at other Maricopa Community Colleges," EMCC President Ernie Lara said.

The Arts Council purchased the land years ago with plans of building an arts center on the five acres next to the college. A refocusing of the council's mission coupled with a lack of sufficient funds changed those plans.

"It's in escrow," WVAC Director Julie Richard confirmed. "The charter school waited about two years for us to come to our decision. This was not done overnight."

A.A.E.C. hopes to be able to break ground on a high school campus in December and start classes in August 2010.

The A.A.E.C. schools work in collaboration with colleges, having students attend high school courses and college courses concurrently.

"The kind of student who wants to go to our schools wants small classes, wants to go to college and is goal-oriented," Conley said. "We are not an alternative school. Ours is a school where students should be highly motivated."

Although the district has a focus on agribusiness, it is not limited to that subject matter. Students are able to tailor their education to the career field in which they show interest.

"They are required to meet with a college adviser their sophomore year," Conley said. "On average, our students graduate with between 48 and 58 community college credits."

Some students have graduated from A.A.E.C. schools with enough credits to already qualify as sophomores or juniors in college. Not only does it advance them toward their career field, it also save families a lot of money, Conley said.

"We pay the tuition while a kid's in high school. We can save a family up to two years of college expenses," he said.

### **Focused on the future**

A.A.E.C. began in 1997 with about 40 students. The district's schools are kept at 300 to 400 students now, Conley said.

The district focuses on establishing study skills and developing successful college students. Many students have gone into engineering, biotechnology, medicine, agriculture and veterinary science. The district also has a Homeland Security component that is being emphasized.

"The A.A.E.C.'s commitment to college preparedness is an excellent foundation for the students who will be co-enrolled at A.A.E.C. and EMCC," Lara said. "A.A.E.C.'s main programming focus is on the sciences - this is exciting to EMCC because we have put a large focus on helping students be successful in the science, technology, engineering and math areas."

Conley worked for the Phoenix Union School District for 22 years and he has now been with A.A.E.C. for nine years. He believes in the mission of the charter district because of its focus on higher education, he said.

"It's vitally important that a kid gets a college education," Conley said. "Our teachers all have master's degrees and doctorates. They are all certified teachers, unlike some charter schools. And we are a North Central Accredited school."

Students at the charter high schools do not have to take separate college courses or be singled out from the college students in any way.

"We don't have them wear uniforms or anything, we want them to meld right into the college classes," Conley said. "They have better success when they go on to universities because they have already learned to be college students."

Anyone interested in future enrollment at the West Valley campus or interested in hearing a presentation about the school may e-mail [wconley@aeachighschools.com](mailto:wconley@aeachighschools.com).

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