

Joint public safety facility with EMCC should improve Avondale response times

by *Jackee Coe* - Nov. 17, 2010 10:51 AM
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Avondale officials say a new joint public safety facility with Estrella Mountain Community College should help improve response times to the northwest part of the city.



Avondale public safety facility

The 18,252-square-foot building is on the northern portion of the campus, near Dysart and Thomas roads, and houses an Avondale police substation, future fire station, the college's public safety office and two classrooms.

The city paid for the \$3.9 million to build it and EMCC leases the land to the city for \$10 a year.

Officials say the facility will improve safety on campus and in the surrounding community, and offers real-world experience to students interested in a career in public safety.

"It's a great partnership," Avondale Assistant Police Chief Lynn Parkin said. "It benefits everybody."

Avondale's traffic unit, comprising five officers and one sergeant, began using the substation Monday. The department plans to move additional patrol squads into the substation in July.

EMCC's campus security will move into its new office over winter break, and the college will begin using the classrooms in the spring semester.

The fire station is just a shell, but fire officials hope to complete construction and move in within about a year, pending federal grant funding to hire additional firefighters.

Faster response times

The facility's location will help reduce response times to the area, officials said.

Now, the two police stations closest to EMCC are each about 3 miles away, while the two nearest fire stations are about 3 and 4 miles away.

"It's kind of in that area that nobody can get (to) really, really quick," Avondale fire spokesman Art Snapp said.

Firefighters average about five minutes and 40 seconds to respond to a call in the area, but would like to cut it to between 4 and 4 1/2 minutes.

Police average about 5 minutes and 36

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seconds for top priority calls, 10 minutes and 39 seconds for second priority, and 55 minutes and 37 seconds for third priority calls.

But response times should improve because the new police and fire stations are located in that area of the city, officials said.

"There is that need. It will help with response times and presence of public safety folks in that area," Parkin said. "It's also about partnering with the community and with the college."

Improved campus security

The new space in the facility for EMCC's public safety office is bigger than its current location. It will enable campus security to upgrade its technology and infrastructure, including its campus-wide electronic door-access control system, closed-circuit television system, and emergency call boxes.

"All of those systems will be better serviced and more coordinated with this new facility," said Charles Summers, director of college public safety. "This new building will have all those things already in it, technologically up-to-date."

Summers said sharing the facility with police was a "natural partnership" because they already work well together.

The close proximity will enable campus security officers to "interact with the Police Department a little more frequently on just more of a casual basis" and do more joint trainings, he said.

"It's just a good working relationship when you're next to each other on a regular

basis," Summers said.

Additionally, the joint facility boosts overall safety on campus because police are so close, said Clay Goodman, vice president of occupational programs.

"This lends a sense of security to the campus," he said. "If, heaven forbid, there is an emergency, they are literally seconds away."

Real-world education

Avondale police and fire presence on the college campus also will offer "real-world" experience to students who are interested in a career in law enforcement or firefighting.

The on-campus facility will give students opportunities to interact with people in the field, do internships with the departments and see firsthand what the career is like.

"It creates a dynamic environment for students," Goodman said. "We're hoping now that it will be staffed that our students will be able to come over and do field trips and be able to take a look at what's going on in that substation."

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The classrooms in the new facility will be used for classes in the college's criminal justice, fire science and emergency medical technician programs.

The classrooms met a need the college had for additional space. The space can function as one large room or be divided into two separate rooms.

"The classrooms are going to be very flexible so the room can be reconfigured based on classes that are being held in there," said Carissa Pool, a spokeswoman for the college. "It has tables and chairs that can be moved. It has the cabinets and storage area for the equipment that they will be using in their training."

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