

## West Valley Magazine, Sept 2010, Shaker, Dr. Ernie Lara

Posted on 31. Aug, 2010 by [trish](#) in [West Valley 24](#)



Dr. Ernie Lara, president of Estrella Mountain Community College (Estrella), has been an integral part of the school since it opened in 1992. Having previously worked at other Maricopa County community colleges as well as Arizona State University, Dr. Lara was originally hired to lead the student services area of Estrella before being appointed president of the community college in July 2007. “Ernie is a native Arizonan and a graduate of Glendale Community College and Arizona State University giving him a unique insight to the challenges faced by Arizona students,” said Estrella Vice President of Occupational Education Clay Goodman. “His entire professional career has been dedicated to creating opportunities for students to succeed. Estrella Mountain and the West Valley are the beneficiaries of his leadership and experience.” A long-time West Valley resident, Dr. Lara has aimed to meet the needs of a diverse student body and surrounding population at EMCC. He has worked through the Diversity Advisory Council with a particular focus on identifying and promoting effective strategies in the classroom for diverse students. Dr. Lara has created grants to support EMCC students including a Title V grant which benefits the college as a Hispanic serving institution. The grant enables and assists EMCC students to achieve in areas including science, mathematics, engineering and technology. He also led the way for the creation of the inspire.teach program that encourages the choice of education as a profession to increase diversity among Arizona’s teaching force. “I am especially proud of this program because we are creating teachers that can and will come back and teach our children,” said Dr. Lara. A Vietnam War veteran, Dr. Lara also serves the community as co-chair of the West Valley Educational Think Tank, a board member for the West Valley Hospital and a member of the Estrella Rotary Club and Leadership West. Dr. Lara and his wife Lori live in Goodyear. They have three children: Andrea, Briana, and Joseph.

Years in West Valley? 29

Favorite quote: That which does not kill you will make you stronger.

Who in history would you most like to have dinner with? John F. Kennedy Jr.

What's your favorite book? 1984 by George Orwell

What's your favorite musical group? Beatles

What you miss most? My parents

What's your biggest inspiration and why? Family, they have always been there to support me.

What do you know about life that you wish you had known 10 to 20 years ago? The value of partnerships

What is your favorite place/feature in the West Valley? Estrella Mountain College – fountains and water features.

Most coveted: My family

What is your favorite cause? Educational scholarships

What would your super power be? To be able to fly

Describe yourself as a child: Quiet and observant

What keeps you up at night? How to keep people working together as a team

One phrase you wish people wouldn't say: We tried it before and it won't work.

What's your favorite food? Hamburgers

What is your biggest pet peeve? People who feel they are owed something and don't accept responsibility for their own actions

What do you do during lunchtime? Eat and meet with staff members

Greatest Extravagance: Electronics toys

Tell us something about you that perhaps the average person wouldn't know? I'm the youngest of 10 children

How did you get into your current career field? The Vietnam War. I wanted to learn more about people.

What drives you? My belief in the goodness of people.

What are your goals? Continue to build the best higher education institution.

What is the secret to your success? I don't take myself too seriously.

How do you feel the West Valley has affected you, and how do you feel you've affected the West Valley?

Appreciation of all the partnerships. I promote partnerships that support the West Valley.

What would you recommend to people looking to make a difference in the West Valley? Let your work speak for you.

Who was an influence in your life/career, and how did they affect what you do? The military taught me leadership and belief in self and team.

What's the biggest challenge facing you in your work? How to continue to improve the numbers of students who graduate, transfer, and achieve their educational goals.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the West Valley, and how does what you do help ease those challenges? Providing opportunity for educational success for all of our students is one of the biggest challenges facing the West Valley. We help produce teachers and the college provides access and educational opportunities to all.

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