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Historic school building in Buckeye new home for satellite college site

by **Eddi Trevizo** - Sept. 22, 2011 09:15 AM
The Arizona Republic

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Students in Buckeye or farther west now have a shorter commute to Estrella Mountain Community College.

The college opened its first satellite campus this week in Buckeye, marking the first time the college has expanded, since it opened 19 years ago.

The Buckeye Educational Center is in the A-Wing of Buckeye Union High School, one of the school's oldest buildings near Beloat and Eason avenues. Classes are scheduled to start Oct. 17.

In January, town officials and the college agreed to partner to bring traditional and non-traditional education closer to college students living in Buckeye, Tonopah and Gila Bend.

Buckeye spent about \$1 million renovating the A-Wing building, which is town-owned, and EMCC paid about \$586,000 for its one-time base rent that covered tenant improvements and the addition of 90 parking spaces. The lease will remain in effect for 30 years.

The revamped building has six classrooms, faculty rooms and counseling and tutoring centers. It preserved some historic items like the tiles adorning the bathroom floors, concrete walkways and iron "B" motifs mounted on the building's highest pillar.

About 233 students have enrolled, Karen Harbin, a spokeswoman for EMCC, said.

Jennifer Complot, 21, said the center cuts her commute to college by about 15 minutes.

"Before, it was a little strenuous. You sometimes have those unexpected car problems and you have to think about gas," the senior said of her previous commute to the Avondale campus.

The main campus is at Dysart and Thomas roads in Avondale.

Now, it takes Complot about five minutes to get to school. She not only welcomes the proximity but the fact that it has helped renovate a historic piece of Buckeye Union High School.

She and other students anticipate some differences from the atmosphere in a traditional, larger campus.

"The main focus for me is to go to the class, get the instruction and come back home," said Christina Moreno, a Surprise resident, who takes classes at both campuses.

Moreno said the new center offers condensed courses which were her reason for enrolling. Condensed courses offer a semester's worth of work in a shorter period of time.

"It's structured to where I can get a credit in a shorter amount of time. The workload is twice as heavy, but I wanted to get all of my classes down and over with," Moreno said.

EMCC officials said students will get a full range of services at the education center, including registration, counseling and non-traditional and traditional course options.

Harbin said 13 percent of the 8,099 fall students enrolled at the main college are from Buckeye and towns farther west.

Of the 233 students attending the new educational center, about 42 percent are from Buckeye.

Harbin said the new campus is just the beginning of EMCC's plans to grow in Buckeye. Six years ago, the Maricopa Community Colleges Governing Board purchased 80 acres in Buckeye for a future campus to accommodate students in Buckeye, Tonopah and Gila Bend; but the campus won't be built anytime soon as the college waits for funds from a future bond issue. Construction is expected to cost \$2.2 million

"The Buckeye Education Center is our chance to introduce ourselves in the community and is a convenient starting point," Harbin said.

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