

# West Valley View

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## A fresh start at 63

*Former school bus driver continues her education*

**Frank Morris**  
staff writer

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There are no stops on the road of life for former school bus driver Verta Tucker. The 63-year-old Avondale woman just keeps going and going and going.

After a 40-year break away from the proverbial ivory tower, Tucker returned to college two years ago. Today, she joins 630 others receiving their degrees from Estrella Mountain Community College, as she graduates with her associate of arts in education.

For Tucker, the single piece of paper she'll receive marks not an end to a lifetime of accomplishments, but rather a beginning - the first leg of a race that includes many goals down the line.

While most people her age are getting ready to kick back and relax after decades of employment, Tucker refuses to accept a lifestyle of retirement.

"That's just not me. I believe life was given to be lived," she said. "Just from observing people I've known who've retired, I saw them grow old, and a lot of them, maybe a month or two down the road, they're dead."

But Tucker believes she's found the legendary fountain of youth, and it's not any product that can be purchased in the beauty section of a drug store, nor is it a special blend of berries that can be bought calling a number that appears on a television infomercial. Rather, what keeps Tucker young, she said, is a lifetime of learning.

### Motivation rotation

The Arizona native - Tucker's originally from Casa Grande - first began working at age 14. The



Verta Tucker

majority of her career has been spent helping others, particularly as a case worker for government agencies across the country, helping people apply for and receive assistance, drug counseling and unemployment benefits. Most recently, she drove a bus for the Tolleson Union High School District for five years.

"I did enjoy the service to the public, but most of my enjoyment came from working as a bus driver," Tucker said. "That's what started me wanting to go back to school."

Through her connection with the teenage youths - and seeing what she called a "loss of generation" and a "lack of common sense" - Tucker said she was inspired to make a positive impact on today's children.

That's why Tucker decided she wanted to become a high school history teacher, or as Tucker would say, "not a teacher, an educator, there is a difference."

Tucker admits she faced several hurdles in returning to school after a 40-year absence - from technology to language class to math - but every jump, she said, was worth it.

"I want to be an example, particularly in my race where young people don't have anything to identify with other than a sweet potato and the Underground Railroad," Tucker said. "I want my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren to know they have a lineage to be proud of."

This summer, Tucker will pack her bags and move to Texas, where she'll be attending Sam Houston State University to complete her bachelor's. Before all is said and done, Tucker hopes to obtain her doctorate and become a college professor.

"I love to see young people excel, but I also want older people to know this is the perfect time to go back to school," she said. "I don't want to be one of those on the senior citizen bus going to bingo twice a week. I'd rather go to class."

And the lifelong student certainly has no plans to be driving that bus or any other - not anymore, Tucker said. Instead, she aspires to be the head of the class and to keep on trucking on the road ahead.

"I've got a long way to go," she said, "but you got to start somewhere."

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