

West Valley View

Replacing a workforce



CLAY GOODWIN, VICE PRESIDENT of occupational education at Estrella Mountain Community College, on Feb. 11 explains the college's partnership with several key energy industry employers in a program that allows students to fast track energy careers. View photo by Ray Thomas

Energy Institute at EMCC prepares students to fill roles of retirees

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By Emily McCann

Community College in Avondale will ready students to fill a vast number of jobs expected to open up in 2014.

As Baby Boomers start to retire, about 40 to 50 percent of the energy workforce will need to be replaced, said Clay Goodman, vice president of occupational education at EMCC.

That equates to almost 1,000 jobs just at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station in Tonopah, he said.

So the Energy Institute at Estrella Mountain is joining forces with several key energy industry partners to provide the coursework necessary for students to slide into those roles.

It's also partnering with West-MEC to offer a year-long program for high school students to get industry certifications and be ready to enter the college's two-year energy degree programs.

"It gives them a good foundation and puts them in a position to be successful with one of those degrees," Goodman said.

West-MEC, which stands for Western Maricopa Education Center, is a public school district that focuses solely on innovative career and technical education programs that prepare students for continuing education and the workforce.

It serves more than 26,000 students from 40 high schools across almost 4,300 square miles in the northern and western parts of the Phoenix metropolitan region.

Students at three West-MEC member districts in the West Valley, Agua Fria and Buckeye union high school districts and the Saddle Mountain Unified District, may be eligible for a grant that will allow them to finish three industry-supported certificates while earning up to 10 college credits.

Funding is available for up to 160 students and will pay for tuition, books and associated fees.

"I think it's a great program for kids, because the future is energy and what they're looking for right now are young folks to come and learn it who want to be in it for the future," said Marilynn Babyar, counselor liaison director for West-MEC. "When they finish, there will be spots for them to have a career-ready skilled position."

Energy jobs are mainly hands-on and available in every state. In addition, adding new skills generally equals additional opportunities to advance.

As new technologies are created, workers will need new skills to install and operate the new energy systems, and that means new job opportunities in a stable and growing industry.

"What makes it valuable for high school students is that these are jobs that aren't going away," Goodman said. "It's not like a construction job that may be here one minute and then gone the next.

"Energy is something that we need to have, especially electricity. It's a very stable, well-paying job and the career opportunities within the energy industry are pretty unlimited."

About 60 high school students attended the first open house last month, and close to 80 have expressed interest in the program, Goodman said.

Students need to attend an information session before signing up. The next one is scheduled from 10 to 11:30 a.m. March 24 at the Energy Institute at Estrella Mountain Community College, 3000 N. Dysart Road in Avondale.

Students will start taking assessments and register for the program in the spring.

For information about the energy pathways program at EMCC, visit www.estrellamountain.edu/getintoenergy or call Kristen Hepburn at 623-935-8499.

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