

West Valley VIEW

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EMCC's 16th annual commencement tonight

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Students are closing their books and picking up caps and gowns for Estrella Mountain Community College's commencement ceremony tonight.

The ceremony will honor more than 600 students who have successfully completed their studies and earned a combined total of 1,250 degrees and certificates.

The commencement will take place at 6:30 p.m. at the Goodyear Ballpark, 1933 S. Ballpark Way. U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis will be the guest speaker.

Notable graduates

EMCC will also be recognizing a few notable students among the 600 graduates.

One of this semester's graduates is 17-year-old Donna Dao, who will be receiving her associate degree a week before her high school diploma.

During her junior year of high school, Donna decided she wanted more challenge in her academic life and concurrently enrolled at EMCC and the Arizona Agribusiness and Equine Center in Avondale.

"I felt like regular high school was a waste of time for me, so taking eight classes a day was definitely a challenge," she said.

Now Donna is planning to attend Grand Canyon University to pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology to become a high school counselor.

"In high school, my counselor was really good and I liked the way that she treated her students, so I thought that that was something I wanted to do. High school can be a pretty tough time."

Keeping it in the family

One West Valley family will be congratulating not just one, but three graduates tonight.

Siblings Preston, Aaron and Andrea Hintz are all graduating from EMCC after attending college together for the past few years.

Preston, 20, graduated from Agua Fria High School a semester early and enrolled at EMCC in the spring of 2010, the same time his brother Aaron, 18, started at the community college through a



U.S. SECRETARY OF LABOR Hilda L. Solis is scheduled to be the keynote speaker at tonight's commencement ceremony at Goodyear Ballpark.



WHEN PRESTON HINTZ, right, the eldest of the Hintz family children, chose to go to Estrella Mountain Community College, his younger brother, Aaron, left, decided to accelerate his high school studies to attend EMCC with Preston. But it didn't stop there. Their younger sister, Andrea, at age 13, also wanted to join her brothers in college. Now, all three are graduating from EMCC tonight. Photo courtesy of EMCC

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dual enrollment program with AFHS.

Andrea, 15, took online classes through the Maricopa County Community College District while she was being home schooled in order to enroll at EMCC during the fall of 2010.

"I really enjoyed it, I really didn't even notice the age gap. The teachers and students were all just so nice to me," she said.

Andrea will be graduating with an associate degree in organizational management and plans to transfer to Northern Arizona University.

Preston and Aaron will both be receiving their associate degrees in businesses and have plans to graduate from Arizona State University with bachelor's degrees in business in 2013.

Preston cites his family's encouragement and value on education for part his success.

"Our parents always really motivated us. They taught us to work hard and be the best that we could be and they were always there to give us a lot of support. They both encouraged us to work hard with our education," he said.

Veteran education

Shaun Ford served in the Army for three years, including a 15-month deployment in Iraq before enrolling at EMCC.

While attending school, he suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, especially while taking tests.

"I had so much anxiety that I couldn't focus. The stress triggered my PTSD and it was something that I couldn't control, which was really frustrating," he said.

By using the college's programs through the Office of Veterans Services, Ford was able to successfully complete his program and graduate with an associate degree.

"A lot of veterans have a lot of pride and I didn't want to get help, I thought I could do it all on my own," he said. "I finally hit a breaking point and I started using the resources that were available and it actually helped me out a lot."

Ford continues to concurrently take courses at ASU and plans to eventually earn a master's degree in psychology to work with veterans.

"I wanted to give back. I wanted to help out veterans because I have a history with that."

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