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West-MEC breaks ground on Buckeye campus, turns eye toward Surprise for further expansion

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Western Maricopa Education Center broke ground in Buckeye for a new campus, and now the technical education program is eyeing Surprise for another campus.

The Buckeye campus at Interstate 10 and Verrado Way in Buckeye eventually will serve 650 students in 12 to 14 different programs. The first phase of construction includes a 32,000-square-foot, two-story sustainable energy building, and is expected to be completed in December.

Phase I also includes a 12,500-square-foot student services building, which will feature a presentation and demonstration space with a capacity of up to 400 people.

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Estrella Mountain Community College will expand its partnership with [West-MEC](#) to include its energy programs, as Arizona Public Service Co. and other industry partners will be involved in the curriculum development and training.

The second phase of construction — expected to be completed in August 2016 — will include an industrial technology building with 23,000 square feet of space and 10,000 square feet of outdoor work space. Also in Phase II will be a 16,000-square-foot health occupations building for medical assisting and medical records programs.

The Buckeye campus is one of four projects for the career and technical public school district funded by a \$74.9 million bond that voters approved in 2012. The project's design is led by DLR Group and the general contractor is McCarthy Building Cos. Inc.

Also on the agenda is a campus at Dysart Road and Grand Avenue in Surprise that is expected to serve 900 students. That campus will offer between 12 and 17 programs where students can prepare for such careers as software/application developers, electricians, police officers, firefighters, auto and truck technicians, machinists, medical/dental assistants and cosmetologists, Surprise Mayor Sharon [Wolcott](#) announced in her 2015 State of the City Address today.

Originally, the West-MEC project in Surprise was only going to be a fabrication laboratory in downtown Surprise, [Wolcott](#) told the Phoenix Business Journal today.

But she said she had bigger plans.

"I thought to myself, at the end of the day, I don't know that a fab lab is necessarily the right approach and is going to give us what we need in terms of technical training and expanding opportunities for high school kids to get the kind of training that they need in the future," [Wolcott](#) said.

Now the Northwest Valley campus will be near the US 60 and Loop 303, giving easier access to more students in the surrounding area, she said.

"Thinking how we maximize the impact of this very important investment, I wanted West-MEC's campus to be one of several showpieces that I have in my mind along the US 60 corridor that will help to rethink and repurpose the entire corridor for economic development," she said. "If people aren't calling me crazy, I'm not thinking big enough."

She said it's too soon to name any other educational institutions that might move to that educational corridor.

"It's taken three years to put this deal together," she said. "We're really focusing on how that translates into more investment on the US 60 corridor."

West-MEC recently was approved to begin offering programs to US military veterans, [Wolcott](#) said.

"This is really exciting, because about 10 percent of the residents of the city of Surprise are actually veterans of all ages," she said. Surprise has about 127,000 residents.

Angela Gonzales covers health, biotech and education.

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