$2.2 MILLION FEDERAL GRANT

EMCC program is tribute to diversity

Big things are happening at local community colleges. Each school is forming its own identity and appeal. Midwestern University’s College of Pharmacy in Glendale is one of a handful of schools nationwide to offer a three-year doctor of pharmacy degree. South Mountain Community College carries a high-tech campus ranking, with one computer for every four students.

Estrella Mountain Community College now is ready to make a reputation for itself after attracting a $2.2 million federal grant to improve its services over the next five years. The Avondale campus is one of 45 institutions nationwide to receive money. Estrella got the second-largest annual stipend in the group.

To qualify for the money, at least 25 percent of the colleges’ students must be Hispanic, half of whom must be poor.

Of Estrella’s 4,500 students, 27 percent are Hispanic. Sixty-one percent of the school’s full-time students need financial aid, and 85 percent of students attend part-time, many due to financial limitations. All that is about to change.

The grant will benefit everyone, not just minorities. Part of the money will go toward technology upgrades, high school promotions and extra tutoring services. Officials also want to develop some new courses to meet student needs and interests.

Perhaps the school’s newest, biggest asset is a scholarship endowment fund that will provide up to $50,000 a year. Over five years, the pot could reach $500,000, with interest paying for scholarships.

The college receives a matching fund for whatever it can raise itself. If Estrella raises only $30,000 a year, it will get $30,000 from the government. To maximize funds, officials are soliciting private donations and developing a plan for long-term funds.

But Estrella can’t do it alone: It needs continued community support to help its students. The process is reciprocal: The more money the college raises, the more students can afford to get a quality education and a better life, providing more money for others to do the same.

If the program goes as planned, perhaps in a few years, Estrella will be known as the area’s most diverse scholarship-giving campus. Then no West Valley resident will have to miss out on higher education.
Federal grant boost for college
 Funds to improve services to Hispanic students

By Beverly Medlyn
The Arizona Republic

Estrella Mountain Community College has been awarded a $2.2 million federal grant to improve services to Hispanic students over the next five years.

The Avondale campus is among 45 colleges and universities nationwide to receive a total of $19.4 million starting Oct. 1.

Estrella's annual stipend of $449,387 is second only to Texas A&M International University, which received $450,000, the maximum annual amount allowed.

To apply, institutions must qualify as a "Hispanic serving institution," defined as having at least 25 percent Hispanic students, half of whom are low-income. Estrella's Hispanic students constitute 27 percent of the college's 4,500 enrollment. Nearly 55 percent of the Hispanic students receive financial aid.

A provision of the grant allows $50,000 a year to go toward a scholarship endowment fund, on condition that an equal amount is raised locally. Over five years, that pot could grow to $500,000, with interest paying for scholarships.

"We're excited," said Ernie Lara, dean of students at Estrella and project director. "This is the largest grant we have ever received."

The money will be used to help people like Asusena Amador, a 21-year-old Buckeye woman who earned an associate's degree in computer applications technology in May. She hopes to get a bachelor's degree to teach English as a second language.

"Estrella has a very friendly atmosphere," she said. "The people here are willing to give students an extra hand."

In announcing the grants, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige noted that many Hispanic students are the first in their families to seek a college education. Amador is the daughter of a homemaker and farmworker who emphasized education to their three children. Amador's older sister also attended Estrella and now is at Arizona State University West.

Estrella Mountain will use the grant money to increase college entrance rates among high school students enrolled at its feeder high schools in the Tolleson, Agua Fria, Buckeye, Dysart and Phoenix Union districts.

College employees will be sent to high schools to identify students who need extra help and to encourage them to take more science and math courses, Lara said. They also will guide students to postsecondary programs.

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