

East Valley Veterans Education Center gets a new home

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(Photo: Rio Salado College)

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Submitted by Annette Flores, manager of Rio Salado College media relations.

"Our military men and women leave their families, their jobs and their civilian lives, placing themselves in harm's way to protect our way of life. This center is just one way we can honor and serve these brave men and women when they return home."

President of Rio Salado College Chris Bustamante spoke those words during a March 26 ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new East Valley Veterans Education Center at 3320 S. Price Road, Tempe.

The remodeled 4,000-square-foot facility at the southwestern corner of Price Road and Southern Avenue is a one-stop center for active duty service members, veterans and their families to take advantage of academic advisement; assistance applying for VA educational benefits; educational, employment and workforce development workshops; and Internet, computer and Skype access.

Zeny Stuart, a veteran of the Iraq War, understands first-hand how beneficial this kind of center can be. She said discovering the Veterans Education Center was like uncovering a gem.

"The staff recognizes that I have a unique set of life experiences as a combat veteran," she said. "I am so glad to know that the center is truly benefiting students and veterans as they discover new paths and opportunities."

The skill assessment, financial aid and college orientation services help veterans use their post-9/11 benefits by mapping out education plans to fit their needs and goals. Academic advisers assist with course and degree selection, class registration and information about resources that help students succeed, while counselors help students set personal, educational and career objectives.

The center also serves as an access point for Maricopa and Phoenix Workforce Development and has a comprehensive referral-service program, working with community-based agencies that provide assistance with employment, health and housing services.

The East Valley center had been serving Tempe from a leased space near Broadway and Price roads for more than three years. The move to this location provides a permanent home for the center, which is adjacent to Rio Salado College Southern — a new location that offers adult basic education, adult secondary education, English language acquisition classes and testing services.

The veterans center is hosted by Rio Salado College in partnership with the Maricopa Community Colleges District, Scottsdale Community College and Mesa Community College. Other partners include the Arizona Department of Labor, Arizona Department of Veterans Services, Disabled American Veterans, Arizona Department of Economic Security, Phoenix VA Healthcare System and Phoenix VA Regional Office.

Former U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, who served as a key advocate and partner in helping the center open its doors in 2010, took part in last week's ceremony and shared a few remarks with guests before cutting the ribbon.

"I firmly believe this: No one can be successful without a lot of people wanting them to be successful. This is true of individuals as well as programs. All of the participating colleges and other partners of this education center want all of you veterans to be successful."

Information: evvec.org or 480-384-9850.

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