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Partnership leads to new diesel technician program at EAC

BY EA COURIER STAFF

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Student apprentices enrolled in Empire Southwest's ThinkBIG Apprentice Program in partnership with Mesa Community College receive instruction on repairing an engine. Eastern Arizona College, in partnership with Empire Southwest and Freeport-McMoRan is introducing a similar program this fall.

PHOTO EMPIRE SOUTHWEST

Eastern Arizona College announced it is partnering with mining giant Freeport-McMoRan Inc. and equipment dealer Empire Southwest to introduce a comprehensive diesel technician program beginning this fall.

EAC said the partnership will give students access to state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and resources. Additionally, students will benefit from internship and apprenticeship opportunities, gaining valuable hands-on experience under the guidance of industry professionals.

The program addresses an ongoing need for FMI, which has been advertising for diesel technicians for operations in Safford, Morenci, Bagdad and elsewhere. Mining involves use of several diesel-powered machines, including haul trucks, water trucks, dozers, front-end loaders and graders.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, the median income among diesel mechanics in 2023 was \$58,970.

"We are pleased to partner with Eastern Arizona College in the development of this program," said Vicki Seppala, general manager for FMI Safford. "As a leader in the mining industry, we understand the importance of investing in the next generation of skilled technicians. We are proud to support the growth and success of aspiring diesel technicians in the Gila Valley."

Mesa-based Empire Southwest is a Caterpillar equipment dealer with locations throughout Arizona, including Thatcher, as well as in California and Nevada. Jeff Faunce, mining commercial manager for Empire Southwest, said the company's participation in the program embodies a commitment to providing clients services and solutions they need to operate successfully.

"By investing in EAC's diesel technician program, we are not only enhancing the skill set of future technicians but also ensuring the advancement and success of our industry," he said.

Empire Southwest is involved in a similar partnership with Mesa Community College through its ThinkBIG Apprentice Program. Students enrolled in that program earn an associate's degree in applied science, as well as Cat Dealer Service Technician credentials, recognized by all Cat Dealers worldwide.

"This partnership exemplifies Eastern Arizona College's dedication to providing our students with the highest quality education and training," said EAC President Todd Haynie. "By collaborating with industry leaders, we can ensure that our program not only meets but exceeds industry standards, preparing our students for success in the competitive field of diesel technology."

Those interested in enrolling in the program should contact EAC's Records and Registration Office at (928) 428-8270 or register online at www.eac.edu. A comprehensive view of available classes can be found at <https://classsearch.eac.edu/>.