

Information Technology

By Lauren Serrato

As the state of Arizona rapidly continues to grow, so does the field of information technology. In the West Valley specifically, there are more than 70 technology related businesses with 3,360 employees and growing, in addition to the 35,000 computer science and IT programming laborers residing in the West Valley.

Tech startups also continue to show interest in establishing roots in the West Valley, adding to the established tech presence including the National Fiber Pipeline and the Arizona Innovation and Technology Corridor.

“The number of West Valley IT/Developer Startups is up 38% in 2022 over last year,” Ron Babich, mentor and advisor to software startups and founder of the nonprofit West Valley Innovation Alliance, an organization that helps startups and founders raise funding and position products in the market said.

“While the startup community continues to grow at rapid pace, the largest result of IT/Tech growth in the West Valley is a direct connection between manufacturing, and other related businesses and their significant percentage of IT workforce adding to the skilled resource workforce pipeline.”

Babich related the growth of the IT field to the growth of the entire West Valley.

“Ask any developer, and much like IT developed solutions, the actual solutions solved by technology are about solving a problem, improving lifestyle, or enhancing an experience,” Babich said.

“Cool restaurants, things to do, things to see, places to meet. All high in the equation of attracting top IT talent. Raise the bar on culture and the IT community follows. A steady truth.”

In regard to education, colleges throughout the state are introducing programs to better prepare students for a career post graduation, as well as feed the IT field as the job demand increases at a rapid pace.

Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale is home to the Microsoft Datacenter Academy and AI Program. The program is a partnership between Estrella Mountain, Glendale Community College, and Microsoft. Each college was initially given \$100,000 in order to launch their first cohort of students. Microsoft continues to award scholarship money, as the colleges have most recently been given another \$100,000 for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year.

“With a partnership with Microsoft and in partnership with the cities involved, we're creating this next generation of IT workers and fulfilling our commitment to strengthen the quality of life for everyone in the West Valley,” Dr. Rey Rivera, EMCC President said.

“That's what makes me excited, not only are we getting students into very high paying jobs, but we're also increasing the quality of life for all residents in the West Valley. When you look at the growing industries, IT is certainly leading, it is one of the areas that's really exploding right now. When you look at not only data centers, but when you look at artificial intelligence and when you look at cybersecurity, these are all things that here at Estrella, we're trying to

utilize and create this center of excellence. For me, what I see is that we're really trying to meet a community need.”

To date, there are 130 students enrolled in the program with expectations for numbers to rise as Aug. 22 marks the start of the new semester.

“To be able to have these programs to serve the community college students is huge as far as preparing them for high demand, high wage positions. It's great that Microsoft has committed to partnering with community colleges to get this opportunity in front of those students. It's really about accessibility. It's about putting it in the place where those students are most likely to attend college,” Paula Livingston, dean of instruction and occupational education at EMCC said.

Livingston said the Microsoft Datacenter Academy and AI Program allows for there to be a “full circle” effect as students are prepared to enter the workforce, specifically in a field that is thriving in the West Valley.

“It really opens the doors to the possibilities for students. That then lends itself to a stronger economy here in the West Valley. As we see more technology companies or even just more companies with advancing technologies moving into the area, having a skilled workforce pipeline right there in the West Valley who can live and work in the West Valley, they're now using their spending power and investing back into the exact region where they live,” she said.

“It really is an ecosystem of supporting the students through an educational opportunity right there in their backyard, but then also if there's jobs right in the region that are aligned with the skills that they've just learned and be able to apply it.”

On a national level, the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 officially passed. The bill establishes an International Technology Security and Innovation Fund to further boost American semiconductor research, development, and production.

“The recent passage of the CHIPS Act will set the stage for the West Valley to attract more companies like TSM and facilitate new high-wage jobs and economic vitality for our region and state.” says Sintra Hoffman, President and CEO of WESTMARC.

The NSF Grant is also in the works to make an impact in the West Valley. The NSF was created to promote the progress of science, to advance national health, prosperity, and welfare and to secure national defense.

With the allocated funds, the West Valley will proceed with the A13 West Initiative. The A13 West initiative proposes to leverage the advancement of local innovation and startup resources - as well as record growth within local education and university systems, new mega industry developments, healthcare, manufacturing and distribution, and a dramatic residential population in-migration – to super-charge AI solutions in the West Valley Living Laboratory.

Despite the pandemic that managed to disrupt residents, businesses and startups, the West Valley is proving its ability to thrive and introduce new ways of promoting, educating and feeding the world of information technology.

