

Cesar Arroyo, EMT/Fire Science, 2006-08 and Nick Untermann, Fire Science, 2008

Years Attended: 2006-08

Area of Study: EMT/Fire Study

Years Attended: 2008

Area of Study: Fire Science

Achievers: Fire Academy Grads Blaze Career Paths

Photo: Matt Hinshaw. Left, Nick Untermann, and right, Cesar Arroyo. As written up in The Daily Courier, Sunday, May 24, 2009 by Ken Hedler.



PRESCOTT VALLEY - Cesar Arroyo dropped out of high school in the Los Angeles suburb of Downey during his senior year just 10 units shy of graduating.

"I was a 'D' student in high school," Arroyo recalled.

As recently as five years ago, Arroyo, 30, said he sported the "thug look" with a shaved head and a "mean demeanor" while living in Los Angeles and working as a

cashier at a big-box store.

His life changed three years ago after visiting his family, who moved to Prescott Valley from Downey. He passed the high school equivalency exam by attending Yavapai College.

Arroyo also earned an emergency medical technician certificate at Yavapai College, and graduated a year ago from the fire academy at its Prescott Valley campus.

Arroyo, and Nick Untermann, 20, a fall 2008 academy graduate, were stellar students, according to Dave Marshall, fire science program director.

"I would give them an 'A+' because of their test scores, their practical skills, their commitment to the program and the community," Marshall said.

Both Arroyo and Untermann described the fire academy as challenging.

"I saw it as both mentally and physically challenging," said Untermann, a Prescott resident. "What I was told (is) your body could handle the work. It is your mind you are going to have to push."

Arroyo pushed his mind, becoming the first member of his Mexican-American family to attend college. He began volunteering with the Williamson Valley Fire Department - now a district - two years ago.

He currently is a reserve firefighter/EMT with the Williamson Valley district, and works full time as an emergency department technician at the East Campus of Yavapai Regional Medical Center in Prescott Valley.

Arroyo, of Prescott Valley, also teaches part time at the fire academy, and is taking classes at Yavapai College with the goal of attending a four-year college and eventually gaining admission to a medical school.

"I want to become a doctor," Arroyo said. "Right now, I get to do the fun stuff. My dream as a kid was to become a doctor."

By contrast, his former student at the academy, Untermann, plans to stick with firefighting. He joined the Granite Mountain Hot Shot Crew of the Prescott Fire Department in April after volunteering with the Groom Creek Fire District.

"I want this to be my career, just be a career firefighter and serve my country," he said.