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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – District celebrates Richard Holmes during First Responder Month

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Charleston, SC – Charleston County School District (CCSD) boasts an Office of Security and Emergency Management which stands out among its peers across the state and even the country. Their programs and procedures are modeled in other districts because of proven results.

It takes all hands on deck to run security and safety programs in CCSD and those hands are handpicked leaders that come from public safety and military backgrounds. One pair of hands, in particular, are those of Richard Holmes who is a retired City of Charleston police officer.

Holmes serves as the Field Supervisor of Search and Safety and was recently recognized as the department's employee of the year. CCSD not only honors him for his dedication to the safety of all 50,000 students and the thousands of staff members, but as a model first responder.

CCSD celebrates National First Responder Day this year on October 28, 2023 as a way to recognize the heroic men and women who make it their business to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Born and raised in the Lowcountry, Holmes is a product of CCSD and the community of downtown Charleston. Holmes set his sights on a successful future, but never dreamed it would be a 27-year career in law enforcement and a second career in school district search and safety.

As a young high school graduate, Holmes hoped to attend Trident Technical College to earn his criminal justice degree. His mother had other plans, telling him she did not want her youngest son going into law enforcement. He did it anyway, Holmes explained with a laugh.

"She was not happy," said Holmes. "I completed the program successfully and passed all the required exams. My next stop would be the academy and my mother said she was not signing the papers for me to attend. It turned out I was old enough and did not need her signature."

Holmes started his career in parking enforcement, and after three years, he was ready for the academy.

The South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy was an eye-opening experience for Holmes, a person who had never handled a firearm before. He had to pay close attention to detail when learning about proper shooting techniques but also the mechanics of a weapon. At the academy, Holmes learned that "detail" was everything in law enforcement.

Holmes's mother eventually warmed to the idea as she witnessed her son excel at the academy. He better understood his mother's position as a worried parent, too. He worked many late nights and his mom stayed up every single one of them, waiting for him to return home safely.

"She wouldn't sleep and it bothered me," said Holmes. "It was not right for me to keep her up all night worrying. I decided it was time for me to move out on my own. She didn't even want me to do that because she would have an additional reason to worry."

Holmes is a spiritual person and relied heavily on his faith to guide him through those early years. He looks back gratefully on a career that helped him to grow, mature, and become a better overall person.

"I was never one to get in trouble so I didn't really have any experience with law enforcement," said Holmes. "My career allowed me to see the inner workings of a police agency and I was able to dispel myths within my community and work to gain trust and respect from community members."

Holmes performed duties in just about every unit at the City of Charleston Police Department. He was a uniform patrol officer, a detective, a robbery detective, and a homicide investigator. He has seen it all.

"I find death intriguing," said Holmes, "I took the challenge and enjoyed learning new things. I worked on many traumatic death scenes from shootings to suicides. I saw those incidents from every angle, most importantly, the tragedy of them."

When Holmes went into the ministry 16 years ago, he was a natural when it came to counseling parishioners after the death of a loved one. With an empathetic heart, he serves families during their time of mourning, often officiating funerals.

Holmes said it finally came time to have a real conversation with God about what his future held. Law enforcement was becoming strenuous and the late-night calls were wearing him down.

Holmes concluded that it was time to retire. The decision shocked many, including then-Chief Greg Mullen. His lieutenant refused to accept the resignation. Seasons change, and it was time for Holmes to forge a new path.

"I made so many friends," said Holmes. "It was bittersweet. I loved my career. I really enjoyed it. Twenty-seven years is a good run."

Holmes delved into work at his church, which kept him semi-busy. However, he could not stay retired. He took part-time jobs in retail and signed on with Walden Security for contract assignments. In 2018, one of those assignments happened to be with CCSD.

"I met so many principals and wonderful school-level staff," said Holmes "They are some of the nicest people you could ever imagine."

Last year Holmes applied directly to CCSD to become an assistant campus safety manager, a position that was recently retitled to field supervisor.

"I have always had a passion for helping people," said Holmes. "My mom taught me to be caring and to be there for people if I can."

This next career enables him to do that in so many ways.

"I have walked so many people and families through traumatic situations," said Holmes. "Kindness and compassion are so important. If I can help one person in this life, then my living is not in vain. I'll have done something worthwhile."

According to Michael Reidenbach, CCSD's Executive Director of Security and Emergency Management on top of Holmes's invaluable knowledge and experience gained over a long career in public safety, his infectious personality and positive demeanor also shine through in his job.

"He works hard to build camaraderie among the team, encouraging everyone to maintain a positive outlook while staying focused on the mission of protecting our schools," said Reidenbach. "No matter the challenge he and his team face, Richard approaches it with a great, solutions-focused mindset."

Day-to-day, Holmes' duties include school security assessments where his team checks for unlocked doors, and ensures security policies are being followed. Every school has an assessment once a semester. Holmes and his team also conduct random searches at CCSD high schools looking for contraband.

"It's a proactive measure that has proven successful," said Holmes. "Our searches do not produce any serious items or weapons. Many times, we do not find anything. Occasionally we find prescriptions and over-the-counter medicine that were not registered with the nurse's office. We use those as learning lessons. The program is working and it keeps the numbers down so we don't have a tragic situation."

Additionally, local law enforcement agencies appreciate the extra level of security at our schools, Holmes explained.

"We work together and share information to make our schools safer," Holmes added.

CCSD's security teams can be found at any given time on campuses and in district buildings.

"We're not trying to catch students doing something wrong," said Holmes. "We are ensuring our campuses and facilities are safe and secure."

Holmes said that his law enforcement career was everything he wanted it to be and he is humbled and honored to serve in this new role. It is similar in that he gets to interact with people from across the county and create relationships and bonds. He especially loves his team whom he considers an extended family.

"CCSD is to be commended for their commitment to campus and student safety," said Holmes. "Michael Reidenbach is someone that I look up to. He is a no-nonsense professional who leads by the book. He has to be that way because we are dealing with the safety of so many precious people. He's created a program to model and CCSD should be confident and proud of the safety and security teams he leads."

While Reidenbach appreciates the praise, the real kudos go to Holmes.

"CCSD is lucky to have Richard Holmes working every day to help create a safe environment for our students and staff, and we're incredibly proud that he is our 2023 Employee of the Year," added Reidenbach.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse portfolio of educational options and specialized programs delivered to the students of CCSD through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools and programs. Rich educational opportunities for students include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; military; dual credit; and many more.