

MEMORANDUM



To: All Personnel
From: Chief W. H. Skip Holbrook
cc: Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager
Date: March 13, 2019
Re: Message from the Chief (*Awards Ceremony*)

Good afternoon,

I hope everyone who was able to attend last night's annual Columbia Police Department Awards Ceremony enjoyed it as much as I did. It was wonderful to see such a good turnout by our staff, who supported by so many family and friends.

We have had so many achievements over the past year. Last night was an opportunity to formally recognize both individual and group efforts, successful partnerships and collaborations with other law enforcement agencies, other COC divisions and our citizens. The awards presented described acts of kindness, compassion, bravery, courage, professionalism and skills. We also recognized our 2018 retirees for their distinguished service at CPD. In all, we recognized 55 individuals – police officers, civilian staff, code enforcement staff, retirees, representatives from SCANA, law enforcement partners from ATF and citizens.

Of course, there would not be an awards ceremony without a lot of people working behind the scenes to plan and prepare an event such as this. Thank you to the Awards Selection Committee for the due diligence in reviewing, discussing and selecting our winners this year. I extend a very special thank you to Shawna Washington, Jennifer Timmons, Pearlina Williams-Burke, Carrie Shawen, Antione Williams, Patrick Goodwin, Sgt. Colin Bailey, Lieutenant Fred Bryant and members of our CPA for preparing the venue and event to ensue that all our needs and expectations were met.

Below you will find a list of all award recipients and corresponding citation summaries.

2018 Retirees {6}

Sharon Alexander – Dates of service – November 11 2007 to November 13, 2018. Before retirement Alexander was assigned to North Region and the Telephone Response Unit.

Debra Brooker (SRO) – Officer Brooker was with CPD from September 21, 1998 – September 25, 2018. Before retirement, Brooker was a School Resource Officer at Logan Elementary.

John Harmon – Served the City of Columbia from November 19, 1993 – November 23, 2018. Harmon was a court officer at the Municipal Courthouse next to the Police Department.

Azalee Harvin – Dates of Service – November 26, 2001 – January 5, 2018 – Ms. Harvin helped with Captain and Officers at East Region with a variety of assignments as Administrative Assistant.

Lawrence Mattier – Retired as a Community Safety Officer under the command of Major Randy Martin and worked with CPD from February 2, 2004 – June 28, 2018.

Donald Synder – Served CPD from March 5, 2012- December 31, 2018 – as a court officer. His son Timothy is a Field Training Officer in Metro Region.

Outstanding Citizen Award {4}

Edna Samuel

Ms. Samuel is the founder and President of the Children's Alliance of North Columbia, a member of the Columbia Community Development Team, and realtor.

For many years, Ms. Samuel has volunteered her time to help CPD with a variety of events – National Night Out, Holiday gift wrapping for officers, and mentoring young girls.

Samuel also began hosting birthday parties for children in CPD's service area at Prescott Manor.

Samuel always combines her passion for helping local youth with her appreciation of law enforcement.

Jannie Nelson

A lifelong member of North Columbia's Hyatt Park /Kennan Terrace community.

A recent graduate of the of CPD's Citizen's Police Academy, and member of the Alumni Association, Ms. Nelson is an avid support of CPD and law enforcement.

Ms. Nelson volunteers her time and teams up with CPD officers to distribute food to worthy North Columbia residents, attends our Front Porch Roll Calls and Public Meetings, mentors at-risk youth, and discusses neighborhood concerns with us so we can improve our community-policing efforts.

Les Wisser, Jr.

A familiar face from CPD's history, Wisser is currently an instructor with the University of South Carolina's College of Arts and Sciences' – Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice.

This former CPD Assistant Chief, continues to serve and protect by volunteering for our Operation R.I.S.K. Program – which teaches youth about the importance of making right decisions and the consequences of bad choices and criminal activity.

Wiser is also a liaison between the department and USC students whose chosen law enforcement path has led them to CPD.

Many of the students begin as interns and leave, having graduated from the SC Criminal Justice Academy and CPD officers - Raven Brewer, Constance Lake, Amanda Zavala, Kevin Davis and Colin Johnson.

Moses Felder

Mr. Felder is the proprietor of Hill's Barber Shop located on Elmwood Avenue and a Pinehurst Community resident. The person who nominated him wrote, "Mr. Felder is a genuine supporter of the Columbia Police Department through deeds and words and fosters community discussions and camaraderie.

Additionally, Hill's Barbershop was a part of the open dialogue of CPD's Cops and Barbershops to help us gauge the community issues that need to be addressed. Join me in congratulating Moses Felder.

Chief's Award {15}

Members of The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives also known as the ATF.

The ATF has been a partnering agency of CPD's for many years with a focused strategy addressing gun violence across the City.

Most recently, the ATF has been instrumental with Ceasefire Columbia – a gun violence reduction strategy administered by the United States Attorney's Office as part of Project Safe Neighborhood focusing on prolific offenders who are on probation or parole for gun crimes.

If they're caught with ammunition or a firearm, they will face federal prison time. Additionally, firearms seized by CPD are processed, test-fired and linked through NIBIN – National Integrated Ballistic Information Network.

This technology compares ballistic evidence from other violent crimes on the local, state and national level to find commonalities of crimes to help solve gun cases.

Jacob Sanderson

Mr. Sanderson was nominated for the Chief's Award for his selfless act in rendering aid to a South Region officer Westley Fitch.

Last August, while driving a suspect to the detention center, Officer Fitch pulled over to the side of the road to re-adjust handcuffs on a suspect. Before he could do so, Fitch noticed that the suspect completely freed one of her hands.

As Fitch tried to secure the handcuffs, the suspect resisted and disobeyed the officer's commands.

Mr. Sanderson was driving by – witnessed the struggle between Fitch and the suspect, and stopped to render aid to the officer.

Sanderson helped subdue the suspect so Fitch could readjust the handcuffs and transport the person to the jail.

Firing Range {10}

These award recipients were involved in what Chief Holbrook calls a ‘labor of love,’ -- hard work from these external partners, for appreciating our vision to construct CPD’s very first firing range. From providing electricity to the range off of Shop Road to assisting with laying the building blocks of the entire operation. There was tremendous assistance and support from the following individuals on a project requiring expertise, planning and patience.

SCANA Corporation - Bill Yarborough and Bardin Stevenson
McClam and Associates – Rusty McClam and Wayne Bye
City of Columbia Assistant City Manager - Missy Gentry
Public Works - Robert Anderson
Planning & Development - Dana Higgins
Traffic Engineering - Ron Armstead
Street Division - Robert Sweatt and Gerald Showers, Jr.

The City of Columbia’s Street Division began the project last January by installing almost 530 feet of storm drain and 6 catch basins.

The largest phase was placing about 880 truckloads of dirt in the standing 28 feet tall and side berms standing 12-feet tall – all designed by the City’s Engineering Department.

The base for the range was built -- and a 6-inch thick pad was poured, amounting to 270 cubic yards of concrete. Completion of this phase project utilized more than 900 working hours.

The Traffic Engineering Division worked approximately 200 hours installing the conduits and electrical components required to operate the firing range and install lanes for officers to train with their duty weapon.

Now, CPD doesn’t have to borrow time and space for officers to complete their annual certifications or police cadets who are training for proper use of a firearm.

Community Service Award {3}

Midlands Gang Task Force - Officer Michael Bailey

In his daily responsibilities, Bailey often comes in contact with at-risk youth.

Rather than give up on them, Bailey invests his time to serve as a “father figure.” Bailey has taken youth and families on a tour of the Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center for a true account of life behind bars.

He’s also led community outreach meetings to assist low-income apartment managers in addressing crime issues.

Those community relationships have established Bailey as a trusted contact for reluctant witnesses to provide CPD with valuable crime information.

East Region - Sergeant Ray Behney

Sergeant Behney was nominated by his peers for his continuous work giving back to CPD. In particular, he helped fellow officers organize, host and cook for the Annual CPD Pancake breakfast that started nearly 8 years ago.

He would bring his family to headquarters early on Christmas morning to provide a holiday meal for officers who had to work. His children would also take part. As the nominator explained, "Sgt. Behney goes above and beyond his duties with kindness and love for his job – which is shown through his actions on a regular basis. Congratulations to Sgt. Behney.

Code Enforcement - Housing Inspector Kirk Miles

A Co-worker nominated Miles for distinguishing himself above his peers by often rendering services that are above and beyond his job description, and in particular, to those in the community who cannot provide for themselves.

Just one example of his kindness occurred during a home inspection, when an elderly woman didn't have the extra money to purchase identification for her home.

Without hesitation, Inspector Miles used his own money for the lady and assisted with the installation process – thus helping the resident to avoid receiving a code violation.

Civic Achievement {2}

Investigator Stephan Narewski

For the past 6 years, Investigator Narewski has assisted with the very first community outreach program at CPD focusing on firearms safety -- Concealed Weapons Permit and Basic Pistol classes.

When the initial class began, there were ten employees and family members who served as a test group for the program.

Since then, the number of participants have increased, exponentially – with Narewski faithfully teaching these FREE classes every month since 2012. Over the years, participants have praised these efforts. And of course, Narewski won't take all the credit – he acknowledges all of the fellow officers who have assisted with the program.

Metro Region - Officer Terrell McCombs

Officer McCombs has been described by his commanders at 'playing a pivotal role in the success of the Department by encompassing everything that a 21st century police officer should strive to be.'

McCombs is active in several community-policing programs such as Front Porch Roll Call, Coffee with a Cop, National Night Out, Operation R.I.S.K. and the revised implementation of the CPD Explorers Program.

Finally, McCombs is compassionate during the course of his duties while bridging the gap between CPD officers and citizens he serves.

Meritorious Service {2}

Investigator George Wise

This nomination is the result of the caring way Wise aided CPD Investigators with a homicide that occurred last August.

The female victim was found in a state of decomposition, making the identification process extremely difficult.

The victim was discovered in a wooded area last August. As the nomination explains: 'with no leads in the case and during the autopsy exam, Officer Wise collected partial fingerprint details from the victim and entered latent evidence into a database – resulting in the victim's positive identification.

These combined efforts provided CPD investigators with a valuable lead in the murder investigation and ultimate arrest in the case.

Investigator Darrius Wade

Since 2010, Investigator Wade has been a CPD Task Force Officer assigned to the United States Marshal's Service Fugitive Task Force.

The team's primary responsibility is the apprehension of high-risk fugitives from the City of Columbia and other jurisdictions across the country.

The job, as you can imagine, is extremely dangerous, exhausting and time-consuming – requiring a dedicated, selfless and brave individual to handle the job requirements. In 2018 – Wade participated in the arrest of 279 fugitives and extradited 18 fugitives from justice.

Life Saving {7}

Metro Region - Officers Joseph Czeladko, Andy Lynch and Karen Jehl

A visibly distressed man was sitting on the ledge of the 11th floor, his feet dangling high atop the Meridian parking garage on Washington Street.

When officers got the call, they recognized the seriousness of the call and wasted no time.

They began to establish a rapport with the man for several minutes.

Officer Lynch and Jehl served as a calm distraction and within minutes – Officer Czeladko saw an opportunity and grabbed the man around his waist, removing him from the ledge and safely getting him to the ground -- Away from any risk.

The officers told him that everything was okay so he didn't have to worry. The officers calmed the storm for the man that day – and was able to call EMS for his medical care.

East Region - Master Police Officer Santos Rodriguez

Last October, Rodriguez was dispatched to an apartment for a suicidal female resident. When he was unable to immediately make contact with her, the property manager helped him get access inside.

Rodriguez found the female hanging from the showerhead in the bathroom. Rodriguez immediately grabbed his tactical cutter and successfully removed the female from shower while Sergeant Howe cut the remaining item from her neck until EMS arrived.

Metro Region - Officers Aaron Brown and Ashley Johnson

This dynamic-duo joined forces on the same call for service that occurred last May at the 1300 block of Taylor Street.

Another man was threatening to jump from high atop the seventh floor of a parking garage near Palmetto Health Baptist hospital.

Officer Brown ran up the seven flights of steps to make it to the man who was also found with his feet dangling over the ledge.

That's when Johnson established a closer rapport with the man. She let him know that both officers were only there to help him.

As the man was distracted by the conversation with Johnson – Brown grabbed the man around his waist and removed him from the wall. EMS arrived to follow up on medical care.

West Region - Officer Jason Van Valkenburgh

Van Valkenburgh assisted Horry County law enforcement with the devastating flooding from Hurricane Florence last October.

As he traveled along Highway 17, he soon noticed that traffic was at a standstill. He got out of the police vehicle to investigate and found a disabled sedan with heavy damage from what appeared to a collision.

A passerby – Maddie Rotondo was leaning inside of the vehicle assisting the driver with serious injuries – an arm that had been completely severed.

Van Valkenburgh ran back to his patrol car and grabbed a department-issued tourniquet. He and Rotondo applied it to the victim's arm.

Ten minutes later – EMS arrived on scene to continue emergency medical care. A Horry County Fire Chief stated that if the tourniquet had not been applied, the driver would have died as a result of his injuries.

Medal of Valor

Jeffery Brink

Last March, CPD officers were dispatched to a Lucius Road Apartment to investigate an assault involving a weapon. Always leading from the front, Sergeant Brink responded to assist officers.

Upon arrival, Brink immediately encountered a victim under attack and staggering backwards out of the apartment, bleeding with multiple stab wounds to his body. Brink drew his sidearm and immediately entered the apartment, placing himself between the armed and aggressive suspect and the victim.

Sergeant Brink de-escalated an almost certain deadly force encounter with the suspect, disarming and arresting him without injury or further bloodshed.

Civilian of the Year Award

Christina Williams

This award is given to a civilian employee who has distinguished themselves above their peers. This employee's conduct and performance reflects favorably on the department.

The co-worker who nominated Christie wrote, "Christie has consistently been the unseen backbone of many CPD projects, professional development trips, and paychecks for CPD employees."

"She regularly makes all of our lives easier being the lead on Kronos, the employee workforce management system, budgeting matters, IT liaison just to name a few of her responsibilities."

"Christie is dependable and resolves departmental-issues even when she's not in the office. 'She makes things happen.' "

Code Enforcement Employee of the Year

Stacy Harris

As a housing inspector for the Code Enforcement Division which became a part of CPD in 2015, Harris' dedication to the City of Columbia goes beyond his job description. He works extremely hard as a 'Vector Control Technician.'

A title that helps control and reduce the city's mosquito population, which as we know, can cause significant problems for Columbia.

Harris performs a litany of larvicide, and source reduction missions to keep the citizens of Columbia safe as possible from mosquito-borne illnesses.

He conducts surveillance and public outreach for the City in the area of mosquito control and was also recently honored by the State's Mosquito Control Association's Technician of the Year.

Rookie of the Year

Officer Alec Maurer

This particular officer hailing from Winston, Georgia – just outside of Atlanta, came to CPD in January 2017 having traded in his baseball uniform for a police uniform and badge. Wet behind the ears, his passion for law enforcement began at an early age....

This particular officer knocks it out of the park by showing commitment, drive and overall positive attitude, supervisors look for in a more seasoned officer. And as his nominator wrote, 'He never hesitates to come to work early, stay late, work those unpleasant tasks.'

He's proactive, patient, understanding and respectful of people he encounters while on patrol. He treats others as he wants to be treated and that's something we can all learn to do.

With an athletic background, this 'rookie' officer has:

51 felony arrests under his belt

Confiscated 10 firearms being carried by unlawful suspects

Seized a variety of narcotics to include: heroin, crack cocaine, and marijuana.

He's also recovered 14 stolen vehicles with the City of Columbia and made 6 DUI arrests.

A fellow supervisor adds, "he will go out of his way to help fellow officers and citizens anyway he can. It has been a pleasure working with him and I look forward to seeing him progress through the ranks in the coming years."

We feel certain – that these acts are a mere beginning of what great works lie ahead for him.

Investigator of the Year

Brandon Dudley

This particular Investigator has served CPD and Columbia citizens for the past 11 years. From the North Region Patrol Division and the Property Crimes' Burglary Unit, to now being assigned to the Special Victims Unit, this investigator's heart is as big as his stature.

His peers are quick to point out that he is routinely assigned extensive cases and does not fail to exceed supervisor's expectations with his work ethic and creative investigative techniques. He handles his cases with care and compassion – which is paramount to working with special victims.

In fact, last summer, he was able to link two criminal sexual conduct case to the same suspect and bring forth charges in both cases.

One of the female victims of these brutal crimes was homeless – and when he found out that she was in need – he secured a job for her at a local hotel so she could stand on her own two feet.

His kindness didn't stop there – the investigator also purchased a bus ticket so that she could travel to and from work until her she received her first paycheck.

Join me in congratulating Special Victims Unit Investigator, Brandon Dudley.

Officer of the Year

Travis Rodgers

The award is given to an officer who has distinguished themselves above their peers. This officer must be loyal to the department, obedient to their superiors, supportive of all projects the department has undertaken, and conducted themselves in such a manner as to reflect favorably on the department.

The recipient of this award has been with the Columbia Police Department since 2011 when he was assigned to North Region as a patrolman. Within a year, his drive, determination and hard work were recognized and moved him into the Special Operations group.

In May 2015, he was assigned to the Midlands Gang Task Force where he continues to be responsible for investigating gang-related crimes, firearm offenses, graffiti removal and community education and outreach.

Last year, the Midlands Gang Task Force focused on reducing gun violence and prolific offenders. This officer took on the challenge by seizing 45 firearms – 10 of which were reported stolen. He executed search warrants by working with our ATF partners to conduct federal firearms investigations which led to arrests and seizures. Five federal defendants were prosecuted.

Another federal case under this officer's belt – a homicide suspect was charged in a 2014 firearms investigation – AND a previous cold case dealing with the fatal shooting of a teenager.

Being dependable, working with a high degree of professionalism and being self-motivated are just a few reasons why the 2018 Officer of the Year award is bestowed upon Travis Rodgers.

In closing, please know that it is both fulfilling and rewarding for me to witness what each of you do every day in service to the citizens of Columbia. I appreciate the trust and confidence you put in me to lead our department. I will never take that for granted.

Congratulations to all our winners.

Chief