

THE DEPUTY



WINTER 2026

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THE DEPUTY is the official publication of the Richland County Sheriff's Department, "America's Law Enforcement Agency."

A Message from Sheriff Lott

Among our challenges here at the Richland County Sheriff's Department is the never-ending need of developing leaders from the entry level law enforcement leader to the rank of deputy chief. In the past, we have placed people in leadership positions and relied primarily on OJT, with measurably proven success no doubt, but with a pressing need to advance leadership skills through effective training. That is why we have developed the RCSD Leadership Academy in which we train all ranks from the inception stages through senior supervising positions (and command), ensuring that all leaders regardless of rank are fully trained and ready to lead.

THE 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

Regarding the progress on our 911 Communications Center: The light at the end of the tunnel is shining quite a bit brighter. County Council has directed the county administrator to have the 911 Communications Center operational by 1 July 2026. This has been a seven-year work in progress. We continue to develop the operational plan while the county develops the \$40-million budgetary plan.

The facility, to be located in the old Columbia Mall, is state of the art, and should last us for at least the next 50 years.



PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Retired U.S. Army Major John Ferrell has been the answer for us: He teaches our intensive three-day leadership course much of which is based on his extensive knowledge and experience with the Provost Marshal's Detachment at Fort Jackson.

Formerly the chief of the Directorate of Emergency Services at Fort Jackson, RCSD Training Officer Ferrell now devotes his time to training our own law enforcement leaders, and through him (and the Academy he oversees) we are not only making recognizable strides in our leadership culture, but the energy and enthusiasm is palpable as we see it in our new supervisors and veteran law enforcement leaders here at the department. Leadership training has always been important to me, but it has been one of my top priorities for this year, and it will continue to be priority-1 going forward. I'm personally very encouraged by what we are seeing and developing through our Academy.

(Sheriff's message continues)

SALARIES

It is a continued challenge staying abreast of salaries. We work on it all the time, and we will continue to do so. Fortunately, we have the support of most of County Council. Most of them believe and know full-well that public safety is the number-one priority for the citizens of Richland County.

A POPULATION INCREASE IN THE BLYTHEWOOD AREA

SCOUT Motors will have a tremendous impact on northeast Richland County, really all of Richland County, and this will directly impact our duties and responsibilities to the same. Because of SCOUT Motors there will be a population influx up to and exceeding 6,000 residents into the Blythewood area. But it's a challenge we can and will address. We are in fact requesting 21 new deputies in the 2026-2027 budget to address the population influx stemming from SCOUT Motors as well as our need for additional deputies for the new Bluff Road substation.



THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION

The Criminal Investigations Division (CID) is doing absolutely superb work in that we do not have a single unsolved murder, nor have we had an unsolved murder in the past three years. That is a testament not only to the stellar work of our CID investigators, but in a broader team-sense to the men and women of the entire Richland County Sheriff's Department and to the diverse communities we serve. The citizens of Richland County trust us, and they support us and our efforts. We are in fact unique across the nation as the community and our peace officers work hand-in-hand. This is a direct result of the bridge-building and long-lasting relationships – friendships really – that we have made a concerted effort to develop with all of our county's communities since 1997.

LOOKING AHEAD

We have much to celebrate, much to look forward to, and much to be proud of. Remember to always stay focused. Always encourage one another. And as I've always said, and which you have always done, encourage and take care of those you've been sworn to protect. Continue to embrace the spirit of both the uniform and the badge you have chosen and earned.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Leon Lott'.

Leon Lott, Sheriff of Richland County



RCSD employees gather for photograph in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Photograph becomes "Photo of the Week" in top national publication

Sheriff Leon Lott (on the far right wearing a pink shirt with sheriff's stars on his collar) was photographed with a group of Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) senior leaders, investigators, and administrative personnel in front of RCSD headquarters in northeast Columbia, South Carolina, Wednesday, Oct. 29. The photograph in which everyone was wearing differing shades and vestures of the color pink, was quickly published as PHOTO OF THE WEEK in POLICE1, the nation's leading law enforcement publication.

The photograph shows approximately 45 RCSD employees, or five percent of the approximate total 900 RCSD employees located within the primary headquarters building and multiple substations and regional-headquarters locations countywide.

"We support our communities in so many different ways, and our demonstration of that support is evident by the way in which we publicly wear the colors for a life and death cause such as this," said Deputy Chief Maria Yturria (pictured far right in uniform but wearing a pink tie). "October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and so it is in a demonstrable way for us in the department every year."

Described by POLICE1 as "pink with purpose," the photograph was taken by Joye King in RCSD's public information office.

The K-9 positioned in front is K-9 Oakley, RCSD's electronics detection K-9.

THE EVOLUTION OF A RCSD CAPTAIN

Larry Payne's life's work is reflected in his three decades of service to Richland County

In January 2018, then-Lieutenant Larry Payne was one of three Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) deputies featured in a national POLICE1 article which examined the department's unique and first-of-its-kind pre-PTSD conditioning programs: A period of pre-post-traumatic stress disorder counseling and training which all of RCSD's newly hired deputies would receive during entry level training before they ever hit the street. They still do: Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott conceived of, developed and instituted the program in 2016. Lt. (today Captain) Payne was one of the initial primary instructors

And why not? No single deputy or law enforcement leader had experienced more traumatic stress than Payne. No one understood the mental, physical, and emotional dynamics associated with PTSD better than he. According to Payne in the 2018 article: "In the past, there was this misperception that you would be perceived as weak if you admitted that you were somehow struggling a bit emotionally. That wrong thinking in-and-of itself was and is the biggest problem."

Then, as today, his words ring true with experience. In Nov. 2006, Payne was involved in a near-fatal shooting in which a suspect shot at him 15 times with a .22 caliber rifle: Two rounds struck Payne, one round in the leg, the other round struck his collarbone and deflected downward, penetrating and collapsing one of his lungs.

Still, Payne managed to return fire with his Glock 40: Firing sixteen shots with three striking the suspect's vehicle.



Larry Payne (continued)

"IN THE PAST, THERE WAS THIS MISPERCEPTION THAT YOU WOULD BE PERCEIVED AS WEAK IF YOU ADMITTED THAT YOU WERE SOMEHOW STRUGGLING A BIT EMOTIONALLY. THAT WRONG THINKING IN-AND-OF ITSELF WAS AND IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM."



"The shooter escaped," said Payne, who today serves as captain (essentially commander) of RCSD's Warrant Division. "But after a three-day manhunt, he was captured and is now doing 30 years."

But it wasn't over for Payne who spent a lot of time physically recovering. "And there were the potentially dangerous (to me) emotional struggles that I didn't initially recognize," he said.

Payne was in self-denial. "At first I didn't think anything was wrong," he said. "Not really."

But Payne's struggles were recognizable to Sheriff Lott who directed him to counseling.

"There I learned quite a bit about myself," said Payne. "And I didn't like it."

Payne discovered he harbored feelings of himself "being the victim," he said. "It made me second guess myself. Here I had served eight years on the department's Special Response [SWAT] Team, and yet my response to being shot in the chest and leg was to shoot his car." Payne admitted that thoughts of suicide had even crept into his head.

Fortunately for Payne, it was counseling and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy that changed, perhaps saved, his life. "That and a very patient boss [the Sheriff]," he said.

After EMD therapy, Payne quit taking meds. He no longer needed them. "I had been drinking and taking prescription Xanax, which is a recipe for disaster," he said.

Today, Captain Payne is man completely devoted to "and loving work," he says. "I pray multiple times a day, and I regularly train at the gym. That and friends are now my therapy."

As head of the Warrant Division, "Everyday brings something new," said Payne. "Some days we serve warrants all day [within the county]. Some days we [himself and at least one other deputy] are flying across the country picking up prisoners." The Warrant Division has in fact returned 20 extradited persons from 20 states in six years.

"It's a great life and incredible work," said Payne. "Largely because of a boss who cares and has always believed in me."

Larry Payne (continued)

According to Payne, that caring and “believing in him” has also been fueled with quite a bit of forgiveness.

Payne, who joined RCSD in 1995 was fired in 1999 after a relationship with a girlfriend who at the time got him into some minor regulations-breaking trouble. “As the Sheriff rightfully said at the time, ‘I didn’t fire you.’ You fired yourself.”

Payne added: “I loved working here so much, and he knew it, so I was willing to start back on the ground floor, if he would have me.”

Lott did, and Payne rejoined the department – driving a paddy wagon to and from the County detention center – in 2002. He was then back on the road, SRT, and elsewhere.

Prior to joining the Warrant Division in 2019, Payne spent seven years in Internal Affairs. “Interesting to me that years after my firing, the Sheriff put me in charge of internal affairs; a division from where I was fired many years before.”

After 30 years, where does Captain Payne see himself in five years? “Here at RCSD if we still have the same boss,” he said.

Congratulations to the 2024 Retirees!



Our 2024 retirees leave behind a legacy of dedication, courage, and compassion that has shaped the Richland County Sheriff’s Department in countless ways. Each of them has spent years serving with integrity, guiding younger deputies, and strengthening the bond we share with our community. Their commitment helped build the foundation we stand on today, and their impact will continue to be felt long after their final shift. We wish each retiree a future filled with rest, joy, and well deserved pride in all they have accomplished.

Sheila Aull
Dan Beadles
Gregory Bunner
Brian Dowdy
Michael Frazier
Daryl Ford
Steve Hair

David Linfert
Nina Mauldin
Trisha Odom
Darryl Rabon
Tanesha Reese
Marsden Roe
Eleanor Savage

Drayton Shealy
James (Stan) Smith
Jim Stewart
William Thompson
Donna Timms
Miles Weaver
Armando Yturria

RCSD Christmas Awards Banquet

Godfrey-Wilson & Associates LLP Scholarship Recipients

Master Deputy Aly Brun

Master Deputy Hannah Gates

Investigator Henry Dukes

Deputy Brittany Jones



RCSD's Official Guidon

Wellness Director
Allison Farrell



Fireman Wannabe

Investigator
Daniel Leyden



Love Obsession

CID Sergeant
Kris Kneece



Our Own Chicken Man

Captain
John Carwell



RIP Armie

Sergeant
Ethyn Perkins

Keith Cannon Memorial Scholarship Recipients

Master Deputy Dominique Lewis

Corporal Jessica Perez

Corporal Spencer Link

Asst. Lab Director Kristin Polis

Threat Suppression Award of Excellence

Sergeant Emily Hampton

Donnie Washington RCSD Athlete of the Year

Investigator Trevor Faulk

Deputy Torrey Hollis & Captain Joseph Pellici Award of Courage

Captain Brittany Jackamonis

Chaplain Terry Barrett Chaplains' Award

Master Deputy Osiah Rivers

Investigator Gary Cannon Great Attitude Award

Investigator Daniel Leyden

Celeste McDuffie Volunteer of the Year Award

Daniel Holtel

Marie Downie Family Association Person of the Year

Aimee (Salrin) Terhark

Ashleigh Downie Explorer of the Year

Bradley Dial

Deputy Darral Lane Drug Enforcement Award

Master Deputy Collins Harper

Fargo K9 Team Award

K9 Specialist Datron Washington & K9 Sonny

Deputy Ryan Rawl Military Deputy of the Year

Deputy Esmeralda Coes

Lt. Mike Poole Narc of the Year Award

Sergeant David Colwell

2025 Candidates for Deputy & Civilian of the Year



Region 1

Corporal
Shawn Sullivan



Region 2

Sergeant
Eric Lewis



Region 3

Master Deputy
Kendra Dunn



Region 4

Corporal
Derek Von Der Hellen



Region 5

Master Deputy
Samuel Gonzalez



Region 6

Deputy
Jyesheria Hicks



Region 7

Deputy
Cordell Brown



Region 8

Master Deputy
Christopher Blackmon



Civil Process, Warrants & Community Resources

Master Deputy
Gariet Pickering



Professional Development & Professional Standards

Instructor
John Ferrell



Operations & Administration

Investigator
Josiah McComb



Community Services

Master Deputy
Tony Jeong



SRO & Youth Services Division

Master Deputy
Monica Parker



Investigations & Narcotics

Investigator
Trevor Faulk



Civilian of the Year

Melissa Harris



Forensics

Investigator
Franklyn Rainsford



Victim Services & Major Crimes

Investigator
Daniel Leyden



Reserve Deputy

Reserve Deputy
John Thompson



Chaplain

Bryan Walker



Deputy of the Year

Master Deputy
Monica Parker

LEADING WITH PURPOSE: MD PARKER

RCSD's 2025 Deputy of the Year

Behind every successful program is a dedicated leader. Get to know Master Deputy Monica Parker and the work driving positive change for youth in Richland County.



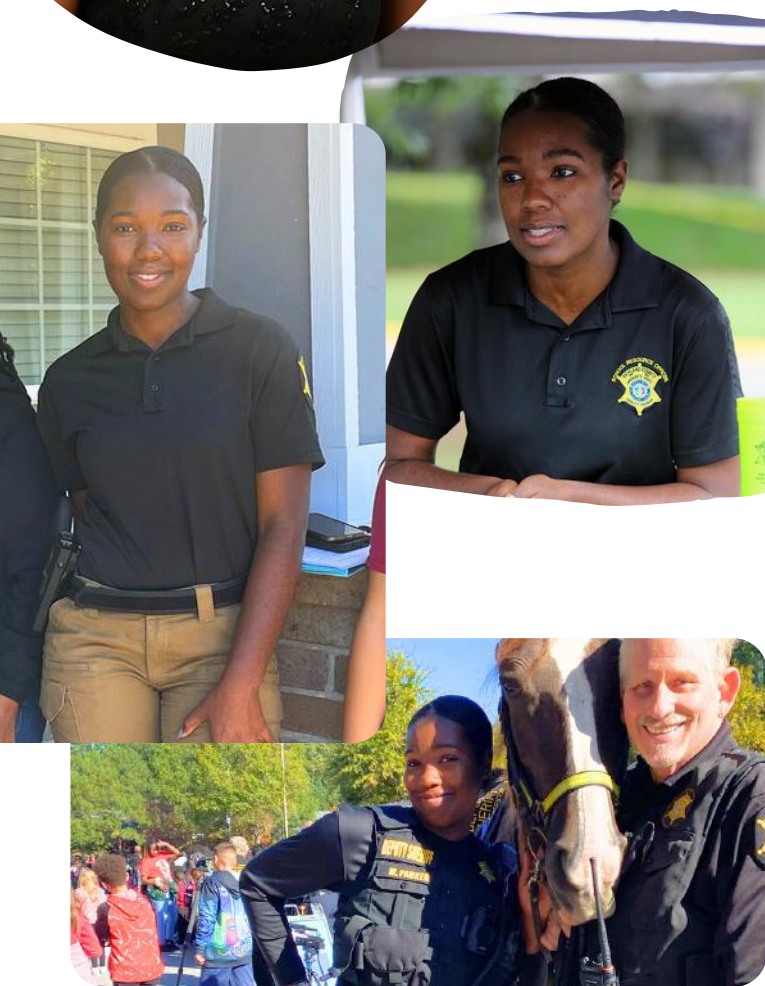
Parker has been the Director of RCSD's Youth Arbitration Program for five years, stepping into a long vacant role and rebuilding the program from the ground up.

She built a strong working partnership with the Solicitor's Office to improve case processing and communication for youth, families, and victims. Parker also developed a collaborative relationship with the Department of Juvenile Justice to move cases forward efficiently.

She serves as an advocate for crime victims throughout the arbitration process, and provides education and outreach so youth understand the impact of their actions on victims and the community.

Winner of the Honorable Marc H. Westbrook Memorial Excellence in Community Justice Award
3 times for 2021, 2023, 2024

In 2025, our Youth Arbitration program was voted #1 best Diversionary Program for the third year in a row with 347 youth completing the program successfully!



"DEPUTY PARKER STRIVES TO HELP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS BECOME ENGAGED AND PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS. HER WORK HELPS FOSTER A FOUNDATION OF HEALTHY COMMUNICATION, MUTUAL TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN OUR YOUTH AND THEIR COMMUNITIES."

-SHERIFF LEON LOTT

RCSD SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER RECEIVES SERVANT LEADERSHIP AWARD

Richland County Deputy among five first-responders to be honored on the eve of the 24th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks

Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) School Resource Officer (SRO) Todd Minemier, one of the longest-serving certified SROs in South Carolina, received Eastminster Presbyterian Church's Servant Leadership award during ceremonies which similarly recognized and awarded members of the Columbia Police Department, the Columbia-Richland Fire Department, the Forest Acres Police Department, and Richland County Emergency Medical Services (EMS).



The awards presentation followed a dinner with family, friends, and fellow first-responders at Eastminster's Thompson Hall, Wednesday, Sept. 10.

According to SRO Minemier's citation, "he has not only ensured the safety and security of Richland County school students – and more broadly the citizens of Richland County – but he has time-and-again implemented worthwhile programs, embraced by parents and educators alike, which have directly advanced student safety both in-and-out of school. In fact, his interaction with students goes far beyond their time in school, as does his work with parents who regularly seek his advice and guidance."

A 14-year veteran of RCSD, Minemier began his law-enforcement career with the Columbia Police Department (CPD) in 1985, retiring from CPD in 2010. In 2011, he joined the ranks of RCSD. Having received his DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) instructor certification in January 1990, Minemier has since proven to be a trusted role model for students, teachers and parents. The citation continues: "His sterling example of leadership has been profoundly demonstrated through his volunteer training of deputies entering the SRO program and as he continues to mentor and help them grow in their work and responsibilities post-training."

Servant Leadership Award (continued)

Recently recognized by American Legion Post 6 with “The Outstanding Law Enforcement Leader award,” SRO Minemier was also recognized by TRIPLE A of the Carolinas for his “OUTSTANDING” Safety Patrol program. He has also been instrumental in leading one of RCSD’s summer camps for youth (specifically “Character Camp”) wherein he continues to build relationships, post-camp with both the youth-attendees and their parents.

“SRO Minemier is a law enforcement leader who often shuns recognition preferring instead to recognize lesser-experienced deputies he personally deems ‘more deserving as a means of encouraging them,” said Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott. “This is but one of Todd’s many character traits that speak to his servant leader’s heart.”

This past spring, when Minemier learned of a six-year-old terminally ill boy at his school whose dream was to become a police officer, he [Minemier] reached out to the S.C. Criminal Justice Academy and arranged for the little boy to walk across the stage with the one of the graduating classes. He then arranged for Sheriff Lott to swear him in as a deputy.

Minemier is himself a cancer survivor, yet despite and throughout the treatment process, he rarely missed a day of work, even when encouraged to do so by his wife, medical team, and supervisors. His philosophy was that by continuing to work with his young people and school staff, it enabled him, facilitated his ability to combat the disease, and kept him strong as he continued to fulfill what he views as “his purpose.”



Minemier’s fellow award recipients included Fire Training Captain Kiante Curenton with the Columbia-Richland Fire Department, Investigator Matthew Holmes with CPD, Detective Robert Oates with the Forest Acres Police Department, and EMT Jacob Shiver with Richland County EMS.

The Wednesday evening awards ceremony and dinner featured a presentation of colors by Boy Scout Troop 10 including Boy Scouts Rhett Krieg, Simon Edwards, Thompson McDaniel, and Will Bunch. Music was provided by the Eastminster Presbyterian Church Children’s Choir. Deacon Parks Bunch delivered opening remarks, and the Rev. Dr. Ben Sloan made closing remarks and delivered the benediction.

The eve of 9/11 event marked the 5th year Eastminster Presbyterian has so-honored Midlands-area first responders.

HIGH FIVE FRIDAY



BONDING, EARNING TRUST, AND BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM IN KIDS

High Five Fridays have become an exciting beginning to the last day of each week

For years (during the schoolyear) one of the most enthusiastically anticipated end-of-week interactions between schoolkids and deputies has been HIGH FIVE FRIDAYS (H5F), a Friday morning period when deputies meet and greet elementary school students arriving at school to begin the day. There at the front door of the school – and it's a different school each week – deputies with the Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) greet students getting off the school-bus or climbing out of parents' cars with a kind word, a big smile, a high five, a fist bump, or a hug.

"Sounds simple, but it's often the highlight of the students' week, and it's always a bright spot in our own," said School Resource Officer (SRO) and retired Senior Captain John Ewing who's been involved in H5Fs since at least 2018 when H5Fs began. "It enables kids to see police officers in a different light – as a sincere friend who

cares about them and their well-being. It's a great way to start any Friday morning for them and for us."

According to Ewing, H5Fs are not simply "high fives," but oftentimes music, dancing, and "always a lot of hugs." Greeting and interacting with kids, whose backgrounds are often unknown "affirms them and reminds them of their value," says Ewing. "It builds esteem in them, trust in us, and it lets them know they're special. And they are: Each and every one of them."

Ewing adds: "I've never seen a frown during a H5F. But there have been times, maybe later in the day, when a kid will be crying, we don't know why or for what reason, but they'll be comfortable sharing their unhappiness with us [because of the trust earned through something as simple as H5F], and usually we can help or offer some perspective to help them."

High Five Friday (continued)

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott who instituted H5Fs throughout the school year seven years ago, said, “High Five Fridays encourage students to see us as friends who truly care, which we are.”

In the beginning, RCSD reached out to schools to arrange and schedule H5Fs. Today schools are eagerly calling on RCSD’s SROs to set-up forthcoming H5Fs. “School administrators recognize the benefit of High Five Fridays,” said Lott.

Master Deputy Rachel Hodge, an SRO at Ballentine Elementary School, says parents who are also law-enforcement officers, but from other agencies, recognize the benefits of H5Fs for their own children and others, and so they (the law enforcement parents) also want to participate in the Friday morning fun; and they often do at Hodge’s school. “I personally see so much love generated through High Five Fridays,” said Hodge. “We may all be wearing different uniforms, but we all have the same goal: To keep our babies safe.”

H5Fs began as the brainchild of Sheriff Lott and local talk-radio personality Keven Cohen.

“Keven had the idea,” said Lott. “I thought it was great, so we did it.”

Cohen said: “Sheriff Lott tries to give me too much credit for this. Yes, it was my idea, but he did all the work to make it happen.”



“I HEARD ABOUT A STORY SOMEWHERE IN THE NORTHEASTERN UNITED STATES WHERE POLICE WOULD GO OUT TO SCHOOLS TO GREET KIDS IN THE MORNING ONE DAY A WEEK. WELL, A SPECIFIC SCHOOL DISTRICT DECIDED THIS WAS A BAD IDEA BECAUSE THEY SAW LAW ENFORCEMENT AS A THREAT TO YOUNG PEOPLE INSTEAD OF BEING AN ASSET TO THE COMMUNITY.”

-KEVEN COHEN

High Five Friday (continued)



"I PERSONALLY SEE SO MUCH LOVE GENERATED THROUGH HIGH FIVE FRIDAYS," SAID HODGE. "WE MAY ALL BE WEARING DIFFERENT UNIFORMS, BUT WE ALL HAVE THE SAME GOAL: TO KEEP OUR BABIES SAFE."



Cohen forwarded the story to Lott and suggested to the Sheriff "that he implement this very program in Richland County under the name of 'High Five Friday.'"

Lott loved the idea and told Cohen he would make it happen. That he did, and H5Fs have since become a weekly schoolyear tradition for both RCSD and Richland County elementary schools.

"Little did either of us know that this would be something that would take off and other agencies would now want to imitate," said Cohen. "I've had a number of deputies tell me they enjoy this as much or more than the kids do."

Cohen added: "I love High Five Fridays because it humanizes our deputies. It allows the younger children to build a bond at an early age with law enforcement and most importantly, to recognize that police officers are the good guys and want to always be there to help young people in need. It's a great way to connect young people with the law enforcement community."

Plus, it's "a great way to start any morning," said Ewing.



RCSD'S WARRANT DIVISION

Capt. Larry Payne [please see story highlighting his career in this edition of THE DEPUTY magazine] serves as the captain (essentially the commander) of the Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) Warrant Division. But what exactly encompasses the Warrant Division?

Led by an RCSD captain (presently Payne), a lieutenant, and two sergeants, the RCSD Warrant Division is composed of approximately 15 personnel, including 11-12 sworn deputies and four civilian employees. "The majority of those serving within the Warrant Division have been with the Richland County Sheriff's Department for over 40 years," says Payne. "Four for over 40 years in fact, and three for over 30."



According to Payne: "This equates to hundreds of years of law enforcement experience in the Warrant Division."

As the division's title suggests, RCSD's Warrant Division is responsible for serving warrants, the vast majority anyway. Some high-risk warrants are also served by RCSD'S Special Response Team and the Fugitive Team. Warrant Division deputies also conduct surveillance similar to what RCSD investigators do who serve within the Criminal Investigations Division (CID), though CID is a much larger organization personnel-wise.

As Payne says: "Everyday within the Warrant Division brings something new and different."

Different indeed: Though the majority of warrants are served within the county, some warrants have RCSD deputies [primarily Capt. Payne accompanied by another sworn deputy] flying across the country picking up prisoners. Over the previous six years, RCSD's Warrant Division has returned 20 extradited persons from 20 states within the U.S.



RICHLAND COUNTY DEPUTIES WIN SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT TITLE

First Responders Charity Softball Tournament held at Columbia's Segra Park

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott and deputies with the Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) defeated both the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) and the Columbia Police Department (CPD) in a double-elimination softball tournament – First Responders Charity Softball Tournament – which raised funds for local nonprofit SERVE & CONNECT, Sunday, Oct. 5, at Segra Park in Columbia.

Participating teams included RCSD, SLED, CPD, the Columbia-Richland Fire Department, and the Lexington County Sheriff's Department.

"This was not only exciting, friendly competition between several mutually

supporting first-responder agencies in one of our city's top sports venues, but it was all ultimately for a great cause," said Sheriff Lott who played catcher for the tournament-champion RCSD Peacemakers. "Athletic competition like this is great fun for all of us and for the spectators and communities we serve."

The RCSD Peacemakers played SLED in game-one, winning 8-2. RCSD then played CPD and won 7-5, positioning the Peacemakers in "the winners bracket" as the only undefeated team. RCSD then lost by one run to SLED in game-three but played SLED again for the tournament title and won.

Softball Tournament (continued)

“We have a lot of great athletes serving as RCSD deputies,” said Lott. “We frankly attract those kinds of teamplayers and sports and fitness enthusiasts because of the culture we’ve created here over the decades at the Richland County Sheriff’s Department.”

Lott added: “That culture was clearly reflected, as it so often is, in this championship win.”

RCSD ballplayers included Lott (catcher), Ricky Johnson (outfield), Kenneth Fitsimmons (outfield), Chris Mastrianni (outfield), Steven Tapler (1st base), Jacob Murphy (shortstop), Rebekah Smith (2nd base), Robert Beary (3rd base), David Adams (pitcher), Terry Norton (designated hitter), Morgan Smith (catcher), Luke Martin (outfield), and Alex Fulmer (outfield).



The Columbia Fireflies, which hosted the tournament, is a Minor League Baseball team (South Atlantic League) based at Segra Park in Columbia. The Fireflies are the minor-league affiliate of Major League Baseball’s Kansas City Royals.

SERVE & CONNECT brings police officers and deputy sheriffs together with the communities they serve through a variety of programs.

Miscellaneous News & Notes



Upcoming Events

Find more details on these events and MORE at RCSD.net

The Palmetto Senior Show
Feb. 12
9AM-1PM


POLAR PLUNGE
Feb. 14
10AM-2PM

CAR & TRUCK SHOW
April 12
11AM-3PM



WALK A MILE IN OUR SHOES 2026
April 21
6PM-8PM

DEPUTY PRESENTED RETIREMENT CREDENTIALS AT AGE 92

Sheriff honors retired Deputy and Vietnam veteran James L. Taylor, Sr.



Mr. James L. Taylor, Sr., a 92-year-old retired deputy sheriff with the Richland County Sheriff's Department (RCSD) was presented his retirement credentials, during a special ceremony at the RCSD headquarters, Tuesday, Oct. 21.

Taylor, who served as both a patrol deputy and in the Warrant Division for nearly 18 years at RCSD, officially retired more than three decades ago, but, until now, he never received his retirement credentials – a badge and an identification card (In some instances, retirees have the credentialed authority to continue carrying a weapon if the retiree maintains his or her firearms proficiency qualification).

“James Taylor’s badge and ID card are long overdue and much deserved,” said Sheriff Leon Lott who praised Taylor for his years of distinguished service moments after presenting him his retirement credentials. “There is no finer man, no better friend, and no greater representative of our department than James who is now the second oldest living retired deputy sheriff in Richland County.”

[The oldest living retired RCSD deputy is Clifford Eisenhower who will turn 93 in November.]

Taylor who began work at RCSD in 1977 under the late Sheriff Frank Powell, retired in 1994 (the late Allen Sloan was then Sheriff of Richland County). Taylor’s retirement was two years before Lott was first elected sheriff in 1996. But the two men (Lott, who became a deputy in 1975, and Taylor in ‘77) often worked together and have remained friends ever since.



James Taylor (continued)

Accompanied by his daughter, Donna, Taylor was reunited with old friends (albeit much younger): RCSD Sgt. 1st Class James A. Lawson, a 42-year veteran of the department, and Lt. Ricky Griddine, a 41-year veteran of the department – both are RCSD retirees who were recently sworn-in by Sheriff Lott as special deputies.

“There is no finer man, no better friend, and no greater representative of our department than James who is now the second oldest living retired deputy sheriff in Richland County.”



Looking over photos in an RCSD yearbook from 1980 and laughing and sharing stories about incidents on the road long since forgotten to most, the four men – Taylor, Lott, Lawson, and Griddine – discussed everything from baseball, softball, the Police Olympics, to Taylor’s lifelong love of golf and his success in the sport.

“I remember you religiously playing golf,” Griddine said to Taylor. “And you were good at it.”

Taylor, who was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1933 and arrived in Columbia for the first time in 1954 (when he attended U.S. Army basic training at Fort Jackson) also discussed his 20 years of service in the Army in which he deployed to both Korea and later to Vietnam during the height of the war as an Infantryman. He also served for three years with the S.C. Department of Corrections prior to joining RCSD.

“I love the Richland County Sheriff’s Department and I enjoyed my years here,” said Taylor. “It’s a lot like the Army where you have buddies you depend on and you never forget about them.”

Asked if the work of a deputy has changed much over the years, Taylor responded: “Oh yes: The uniforms have changed, and we didn’t have all these vests, tasers, and cameras like they have today. The only radio we had was in the car. Also you didn’t really have gangs back in my day like you have today.”

Taylor expressed deep gratitude for the Tuesday afternoon honor and for Sheriff Lott’s and others’ recognition of him.

“I think I want to shed a tear,” Taylor said. “As the saying goes, ‘You should put a man in the hall of fame when he lives. Not when he dies.’ That’s how I feel about this.”

Taylor celebrated his 92nd birthday on December 5, 2025.

RACHEL KIM HODGE TRAVELS TO SOUTH KOREA

Popular Midlands-area SRO attends international police conference in Seoul



I love Korea. I love and respect the country for its deep, rich history and culture (food and art included), and for the very nature of who the Korean people are and have been for centuries. Korean people, to me, are a unique blend of humility, resiliency, toughness, and a universal kindness that may be equaled, but is not surpassed by any other people group on the planet.

I KNOW: I spent quite a bit of time in the Republic of Korea (ROK) many years ago training with the ROK Marines and my own U.S. Marines in-and-around the Marine Corps Expeditionary Camp Muchuk near the port city of Pohang. That and there are the many friends, neighbors, and acquaintances I've come to know within the Korean-American communities here in South Carolina since. But enough about me.

Still, I thought about all of the above as I considered Master Deputy Rachel Kim Hodge, a School Resource Officer (SRO) with the Richland County Sheriff's Department who serves at Ballentine Elementary School. Hodge is herself unique: A former soldier in the U.S. Army, a wife, a mom, an artist, an arts instructor, a summer camp leader, a friend to all, a literal giver-of-herself and her time (in an increasing world of takers) and one of the top competitive rifle and pistol shooters in the Palmetto State, quite possibly the nation.



Even my 91-year-old Mom remarked [after Hodge painted flags for both my late stepfather and me]: "Is there anything this young woman, Rachel, can't do?"

Rachel Hodge (continued)

Recently, Hodge traveled to South Korea – on the invitation of the ROK government – where she attended an international conference at the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) in Seoul. There at the KNPA, Rachel met with KNPA officials and law enforcement officers from around the world including INTERPOL which has its Korean headquarters located at the Academy. The conference, held in November 2025, lasted for one week and included lectures and workshops, opportunities to interact with other agencies and to learn the finer points of ROK police traffic and security systems: The conference also included in-depth discussions and information-sharing as regards regional and global human trafficking and drug enforcement.



“It was truly an amazing and enlightening experience for me and others,” said Hodge. “And intelligence gleaned, and lessons learned will be put to good use here at the Richland County Sheriff’s Department.”

How did the opportunity come about for Master Deputy Hodge? The Atlanta, GA-based South Korean Consulate General’s office sought her out. They reached out to Hodge, invited her to attend, and Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott approved the trip.

The first-ever law enforcement officer from South Carolina to attend the annual conference, Hodge was also one of only four female law-enforcement officers invited to attend: Only two females attended from the United States and two from Canada. Law enforcement officers from the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Australia also attended.

In addition to S.C., law enforcement officers representing the U.S. included attendees from New York, California, and Washington, D.C.

All food, travel, and accommodations were paid for by the South Korean government.

Hodge added: “I really appreciate the leadership and willingness of Sheriff Lott to allow me this opportunity.”

A native of Seoul and fluent in both English and Korean languages (she’s listed on the RCSD on-call bilingual team), Hodge has been with RCSD since 2018.

From the Editorial Director



Welcome to the first edition of THE DEPUTY in the New Year 2026. You'll notice that we continue to evolve, no longer as simply a newsletter, but as an in-house magazine offering the same features as previous editions from the timely 'Sheriff's Message' to High Five Fridays to short news stories and commentaries to so much more.

THE DEPUTY is no longer a production of yours truly alone, but a host of talented writers from our Public Information Office, most notably Deputy Jamie Burton. THE DEPUTY is also going to be published more frequently throughout the year, bringing you all the features and photos you have all come to expect and look forward to.

As always, we're looking for story ideas or suggestions, so please don't hesitate to drop us a line. Want to write for THE DEPUTY? Do you have a news story in mind? Maybe an op-ed idea you want to pitch? We are always looking for contributors. Let us know. We're here for you. Also, let us know what you think of the new look of THE DEPUTY. It's going to get even better.

W. Thomas Smith, Jr.

Media and Special Projects
RCSD Public Information Office
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RCSD in
national print
and other media



Your vest is the difference between close call and tragedy.

Wear the vest, or pay the price!

Since 2005, more than 130 American law enforcement officers have been killed after having been struck by vehicles along U.S. roads and highways, according to THE NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL FUND. All life is precious! You are not the exception. Your highly visible traffic vests are vital, DAY OR NIGHT! Just like your vital ballistic body armor. WEAR BOTH!



THE NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MEMORIAL FUND also says that over the past 10 years, more than 1,500 law enforcement officers have lost their lives in the line of duty.

That's "an average of one [law enforcement officer] death every 58 hours, or 151 deaths per year." In 2017, there were 129 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty.

"I hope seeing this photo of me will remind deputies to wear their traffic vests."

- the late Deputy Jerry Hurd



Deputy Hurd was struck by a vehicle on duty in 2002.



2025 *Year in Review*

We're saying goodbye to 2025!

From thousands of calls for service and 100% murder solve rates to K9s stealing hearts and plenty of High Five Fridays — this year shows what serving Richland County is all about.

Thank you to our deputies, staff, and community for standing with us!



100% Murder
Solve Rate



7 Parents Held
Accountable



172 Seized Stolen
Guns



374 Crisis Intervention
Team Responses



179,317 Calls for
Service



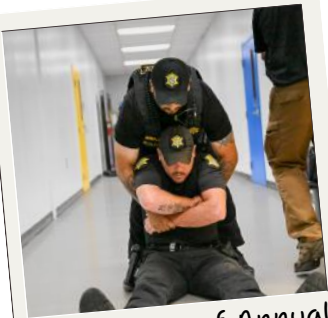
31 High Five
Fridays



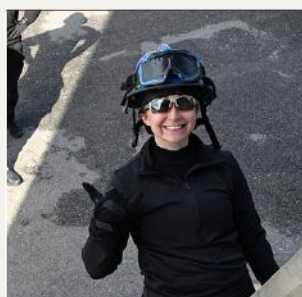
188 SRO Community
Events



10,412 Hours of New
Hire Instruction



1,428 Hours of Annual
In-Service Instruction



290 Hours of Advanced
Course Instruction



133 Deputies
Promoted



16 Deputies
Retired



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