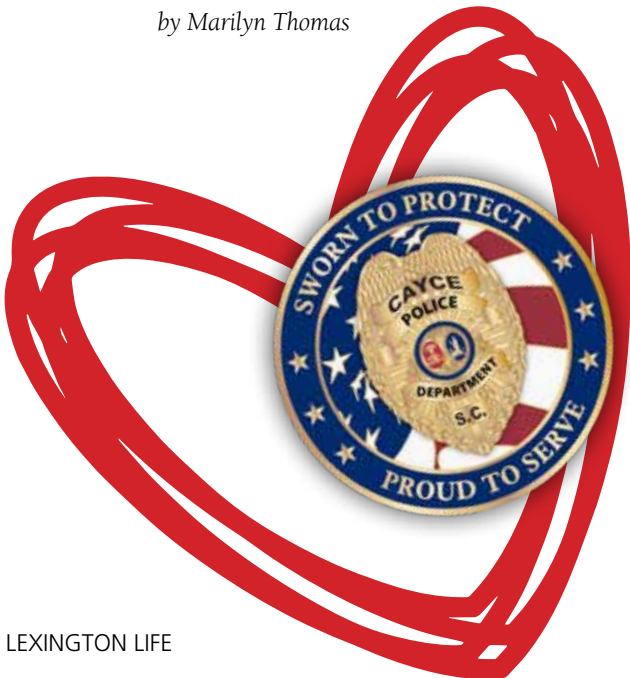


Lieutenant Danielle McCord

The Heart Beneath the Badge

by Marilyn Thomas



With a grandfather and father who served in the military, and a stepfather who was a police officer, protecting others has always been natural for Danielle McCord, a lieutenant in the Cayce Police Department. "Serving was embedded in my soul early on in my life," she says. A Gilbert High School graduate with a bright future and many influential family role models, Lt. McCord dreamed of attending law school. She wanted to become an attorney so she could "advocate for juveniles placed in the system and one day become a family court judge." However, "God's plan, which we sometimes do not agree with or understand, was different," she says.

Surviving domestic violence in her first marriage motivated Lt. McCord to choose a different career path than what she originally envisioned. "It was not an easy process for someone with no knowledge of the system," she explains, "and I decided that I wanted to be that voice for someone else and the one to lead them through a very complicated and scary criminal justice process." To that end, Lt. McCord entered the field of law enforcement as a dispatcher and became an officer with the Cayce Police Department



as soon as she met the age and other eligibility requirements. Correspondingly, she also acquired an Associate Degree in Criminal Justice and has since been pursuing a bachelor's degree.

"The why I do it part is huge for me," explains Lt. McCord. "I do this job because it's in my heart. Every part of my being wants to be out there in the community making a positive impact. I do it because it's a calling, and it takes a very special person with a very special heart to face evil every single day. I do it because if I can change the life of one person every time I suit up, then I know I have accomplished the mission." While navigating this challenging profession, Lt. McCord's vocational approach has been systematic, conscientious, and intentional. "It was important to me to work in every division in the agency to ensure that I had knowledge of every moving part and could efficiently do each job," she says. Several areas within the Cayce Police Department where she has served include Victim Services, the Patrol Division, and the Investigative Division. "I felt like having knowledge of each role would make me a better supervisor one day."





Her goal of attaining a supervisory position was achieved when, in 2020, she was the first female to be promoted to sergeant in Cayce in the past twenty years. In 2021, she was advanced again to the rank of lieutenant and, as such, became the first female to do so in the history of the agency. Some might say that Lt. McCord has defied the odds. “Every career has challenges,” explains Lt. McCord. “I would say one of the biggest ones in this profession is being a female trying to find your place in a male-dominant profession. You have to really find your place, work harder at times, and step up even when people are expecting you to fail. You have to be confident in who you are and who you want to be. Lead by example every single day and do not accept defeat or failure. You have to always remember your success is up to you and people count on you to be the best that you can be every single day.” To women who are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement, she offers this advice: “You are in total control of your career. Work hard, go after, and master every goal you set for yourself. Be confident and do not let anyone steal your joy or make you feel less adequate. Be fearless and stay in control of your career path. Females are absolutely needed in this profession and bring many different attributes to the table.”

Currently Lt. McCord is the lieutenant over the Community Services Division and in this role she must fulfill several essential duties. These duties include, but are not limited to supervising social media communications, assisting with public information officer duties, alongside operations under the title of public affairs officer. Additionally, she supervises the Community Outreach Policing Services (C.O.P.S.) unit and the School Resource Officers’ (SRO) team. “Community is a big part of my job,” asserts Lt. McCord. “Our agency hosts many community events during the year. These events build trust and strengthen relationships within our community, and it’s so important that we do that.” According to the Cayce Police Department’s website at caycepd.com, the mission of C.O.P.S. is to create positive community relationships with busi-

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nesses and nonprofit organizations within Cayce, so that together, these partnerships can improve the quality of life for local citizens by focusing on crime prevention, citizen education, community involvement, and meeting the needs of people in distress.

In the SRO Division, the department collaborates with city, county, and state officials to identify and apply best practices that promote school safety, security, intervention/prevention, deterrence, and emergency preparedness planning. “I firmly believe that I work alongside the BEST SROs in the state,” Lt. McCord says. “They each are committed to being a servant and to making a difference every single day. They each pour themselves into their schools, building relationships, mentoring students, supporting students, and effecting change. My team does not just work an 8-5. We attend our students’ graduations, baby showers, weddings, christenings, etc., after hours because we



want to show them that we are there for them.”

Because of their personal dedication to fulfilling their responsibilities, Lt. McCord and her team of officers have received notable accolades for their service. In 2021, Lt. McCord was honored with the Midlands Region SRO of the Year Award, and in 2022, she was selected as the Supervisor of the Year and her unit was recognized as the SRO Unit of the Year. Also in 2022, Governor Henry McMaster presented her with the Order of the Palmetto, the highest South Carolina civilian honor given for service and achievements. “My team works incredibly hard day in and day out,” says Lt. McCord. “They are the ones doing the heavy lifting, and they deserve to be recognized every single day.”

“I have been fortunate to work for and alongside many amazing leaders in my time here,” adds Lt. McCord. “In the last year, our department had a change in leadership. Chief Cowan came in and promoted me, along with several others, to lieutenant. Chief has pushed me WAY out of my comfort zone at times and forced me to think outside the box and afforded me so many opportunities to be a better person, a better officer, and a better leader.” Other positive changes within the department in the recent past include re-accreditation through the South Carolina Law Enforcement Accreditation Council. In addition, Chief Cowan successfully acquired electronic bikes and an electronic car for the agency. “The E-car is my vehicle,” says Lt. McCord. “I have really enjoyed the Tesla, thus far, and I am hoping that we add some more to our fleet in the future. This innovation, the first of its kind in South Carolina, is important. IT [information technology] shows that we are committed to finding partnerships that save the taxpayers money. It shows that we are committed to finding new ways to police. It shows that we are committed to caring not only about putting the bad guys in jail but also about our environment and about our future leaders: our children.” When not in uniform, Lt. McCord, who is married and a mother of five, coaches volleyball at Busbee Creative Arts Academy. “This year we were named the 2022 Eastern Division



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Champions,” she says. “It was important to me for my kids to see us outside of our uniforms, so several in my unit coach different sports—it’s really been a game-changer.”

As she moves forward, Lt. McCord intends to “make myself the best version of me that I can be” for the force and the community, and this involves continuing her education and completing Law Enforcement Executive Development Association classes through the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She also hopes to be promoted to captain before retirement. “This has been a rewarding career,” she says. “I love the community aspect and being able to give back. I love being able to show the community that the police can be trusted, we do care, we love our communities, we are invested in the growth of our communities, and, also, that we are human beings outside of the uniform.” ■