

For Immediate Release

November 9, 2018

Contact:

Erica Taylor 843-937-6303

Media Release

Honoring the Veterans Among Us

Charleston, SC – The thousands of employees of Charleston County School District work alongside heroes day in and day out and most likely don't even know it. Those heroes avoid the spotlight and walk humbly in their commitment to the United States of America through their military service.

The men and women recognized on Veterans Day are the backbone of this great country and we are grateful to be recognizing the tradition of selfless service.

In honor of Veterans Day, fellow employees Rich Gordon and Jay Tronco are being highlighted for their service to the state of South Carolina in the wake of Hurricane Florence.

Rich Gordon

Rich Gordon, Executive Director of Career and Technology Education (CTE), has served in the district in various roles over the last 14 years - just as he has done for his country.

Gordon served his country in two tours of active duty military service at the ranks of First Lieutenant and Major in 2003-2004 and 2012-2013, respectively.

Gordon enlisted in the Army in 1997 and, upon graduating from Rutgers University in 1999, earned his ROTC commission as an Army officer. As a logistics officer, he's served on transportation units, maintenance, and quartermaster units. Now, as a member of the South Carolina National Guard, he serves in Future Operations.

Gordon's team forecasts and anticipates what will be needed during "an event" that needs National Guard response. Most recently, he was summoned to the State Emergency Operations Center Sunday, September 9, 2018, in Pine Ridge, SC in preparation for Hurricane Florence.

The Future Operations team immediately went to work organizing with governmental, military, and civilian organizations to plan, prepare, and coordinate emergency actions and executions.

"The team plans, preps, coordinates, and executes a response to any emergency the state has," said Gordon. "There are numerous organizations we must work

Office of Strategy and
Communications

Gerrita Postlewait, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Erica Taylor
Chief Officer

with to coordinate the response; the South Carolina Department of Transportation, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.”

In this particular instance, Gordon and his team watched the track of the hurricane, analyzing where it was going to hit and what to expect. As a logistics officer, Gordon was responsible for getting commanders on the ground with the right equipment, tools, vehicles, and supplies at the right place and the right time.

The first project was in Conway at Highway 501. Once they learned this would not be a wind event, but a rain and flood event, officials knew it would be a different response because with rain and floods come different consequences.

“It was about tapping into resources such as high water vehicles and obtaining, filling, and delivering sandbags to fortify homes, schools, hospitals, roads and other civilian structures,” Gordon said. “Once immediate needs were in place, officials waited for the storm to hit and analyzed and organized delivery and service to address other needs.”

Gordon said that soldiers from other states arrived to assist in everything from security missions to wellness checks to augment the existing boots on the ground.

For Gordon, it was a three-week process working 12-hour shifts.

“I was fortunate we were in a secure location with the opportunity to work alongside state leaders and various emergency response agencies to provide rapid response to South Carolinians,” said Gordon. “Soldiers came from all over with all sorts of specialties. There were so many spokes in the wheel. All of those knowledgeable skills and abilities were combined into a successful team effort.”

Gordon said he was humbled, honored, and privileged to serve the state and do what he always wanted to do.

Gordon grew up wanting to be in the military but was unsure of the process. As fate would have, he was drawn to the ROTC program in college. That put him on a pathway to the National Guard.

“I always wanted to serve my country and my community, and through CCSD and the National Guard, I get to do both,” said Gordon. “The military is a fantastic opportunity to learn and grow. It provides a successful career path with rigorous and relevant preparation for your future goals. It also builds resiliency and grit and provides you with marketable skills and opportunities to serve others.”

Jay Tronco

Jay Tronco teaches law enforcement at North Charleston High School. He is a former police officer with the Town of Mount Pleasant.

As a child growing up in Charlotte, NC, he had a calling to do something more for society, and he wanted to do so in a patriotic sense. He was assigned to the Marine Patrol while with Mount Pleasant Police Department (MPPD) and witnessed some unsafe activities and often wondered "do these people just not care or just not know?" He wanted to do more to educate – not just enforce.

All of those years on the water led him towards an unlikely career path in the United States Coast Guard. At the age of 37, he was able to enlist with the help of waivers that were required due to his age.

Eleven years later, he now serves as a Maritime Enforcement Specialist, 1st Class E6.

In his 11 years in the Coast Guard, Tronco has responded to three flooding events in South Carolina. Most recently, he was sent to the Conway area to prepare for the coming floods from Hurricane Florence.

"There are 11 rivers in North Carolina, and 9 of them dump into South Carolina," Tronco said. "We knew the flood waters were coming and taking everything with it. We knew there would be numerous reasons for us to be out there helping in those communities."

Tronco described the disease-infested flood waters as being contaminated from the hundreds of thousands rotting farm animal corpses and damaged septic tanks, leach fields, oil, and gas. He said the rise in the water levels led to unknown obstacles during residence checks such as residential propane tanks and loose boats and docks. The alligators and water moccasins were also a hazard due to them blending in with the color of the rising water.

A moratorium on marine vessel traffic was put in place because the wakes from those vessels were creating even more damage to nearby land structures. Tronco and his team enforced the moratorium while continuing to inspect residences for animal or human occupancy.

One man refused to leave, and Tronco exchanged numbers with him with the warning that there was no guarantee the Coast Guard could even return to get the man should an emergency arise. Three days later, the resident called Tronco and said he had managed to find a friend with a boat who came and got him.

A typical day lasted anywhere from 12 to 14 hours. He was there for 28 days and said that the needs changed so rapidly that one minute they were trying to

convince a resident to evacuate and the next they were assessing damaging and taking measures to prevent further damage.

The Coast Guard was the last to leave the area. Many streets were still flooded, but when the threat to the Georgetown city limits ended, his mission was complete.

Tronco returned to the classroom where he works hard to show his students that he cares about them and is there to help them do the work, get something out of it, and not quit on themselves.

Tronco hopes his introduction of law enforcement and his service in the Coast Guard will encourage some of his students to consider those as future careers.

"Joining the military was one of the best decisions I ever made," he said. "I've developed so many friendships and relationships. The only regret I have is not joining up a lot sooner."

###

About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school system in South Carolina representing a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools that span 1,000 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves more than 50,000 students in 86 schools and specialized programs. With approximately 6,100 employees district-wide, CCSD is the fourth largest employer in the region.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, charter, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), and Montessori schools, and is divided into three Learning Communities. Options include specialized programs in science, engineering and mathematics; liberal arts; music and other creative and performing arts; career and technical preparation programs; and military and other public service enterprises.