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Serve & Connect announce 2023 Award Finalists for Illuminight Gala

(Columbia, SC) Serve & Connect will host its annual fundraiser, the Illuminight Gala, on March 3 at Central Energy in Columbia. Illuminight Gala is the nonprofit's signature fundraising event set to celebrate the organization's mission, including the presentation of the Greg Alia Award and the Changemaker Award. This year's event is presented by The City of Forest Acres.

The Greg Alia Award is presented to a police officer who has demonstrated exceptional service by going above and beyond the call of duty to build trust, strengthen partnerships, and engage in collaborative solutions that improve their community.

Finalists for the 2023 Greg Alia Award are:

Sgt. Allen Brinson, Columbia Police Department

Sgt. Brinson is recognized for demonstrating exceptional leadership in his role as a supervisor to young officers, mentoring them through diverse life stages and modeling what it means to serve with compassion. He is described as thriving on being patient, and often steps up to help citizens in need, including when he was recently recognized for taking the time to change a taxi driver's tire.

Lt. Danielle McCord, Cayce Police Department

Lt. McCord is described as someone who inspires her peers to be better, and who every day works to better the lives of others. As the lieutenant over community policing, social media and social resource officers, she works long hours on developing programs that inspire relationships between officers and young people while still being a devoted mother and wife.

Sgt. Anthony Viehweg, Columbia Police Department

Sgt. Viehweg joined law enforcement because he wanted to help people and make a difference. According to his peers, his is doing just that as the leader of Columbia Police Department Metro Region's Community Response Team. In his role, he is an advocate for community interaction and can be seen cooking on the grill during summer cook out series and tossing footballs with community members.

The Change Maker Award is presented to a community leader who has gone above and beyond to serve their community by engaging resources, serving neighbors, and



collaborating with partners to promote safety and resilience. Finalists for the 2023 Change Maker Award are:

Mr. Christopher Emanuel, Second Baptist Teen After-School Center & Sky is the Limit Foundation, Aiken, SC

Mr. Emanuel dedicates his time, love, and compassion for the betterment of Aiken and the youth that reside there. He works tirelessly to build bridges with students from impoverished neighborhoods and connect them with lessons and life skills that uplift them and others.

Ms. Loretta Coleman, Loretta Coleman Ministries, Columbia, SC

Sheriff Leon Lott shared: "In my 27 years as Sheriff, I have never seen anyone in the Richland County community dedicated to help communities and individuals as she has." Examples of her service include providing clothing, shoes and toiletries to Transitions Homeless Shelter; school supplies for at-risk children; and toiletries and food for families in need.

Kieley Sutton, Richland County Office of the Public Defender & Rainy Day Fund, Columbia, SC

What may seem an odd pairing - a defense attorney and officers working together - Ms. Sutton working alongside officers to ensure residents receive the care and support they need. This includes finding alternatives to arrest when a senior experiencing dementia was found trespassing or when an individual experiencing homelessness had an emergency and needed help caring for their pet.

Si Se Puede, Cayce, SC

Si Se Puede, a movement for bridging healing between first responders and the Hispanic community. What started as a vision for a singular event has since grown into a movement for change engaging over 40 individuals from over 20 organizations. They have launched initiatives to reduce barriers to communication and increase opportunities to build relationships that grow trust.

About Serve & Connect

Serve & Connect is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that aims to ignite positive change through police-community partnerships. Kassy Alia Ray founded the organization in memory of her late husband, Officer Gregory Alia, who was killed in the line of duty in 2015. Backed by evidence-based practices designed to fuel collaboration, Serve & Connect provides the tools, training, and technical assistance necessary for police departments, local organizations, leaders and residents to work together to improve community outcomes.

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