

## Introduction

**Julia Jarema:** Hi, welcome to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety. There are great people, programs and resources within this department. In each episode of the Safety Scoop, we'll share how NCDPS employees prevent, protect and prepare North Carolinians and help enhance safety in our state. We hope you'll listen along and learn something you may not have known about the largest state agency in North Carolina.

[Music]

**Julia:** Hi, I'm Julia.

**Kirsten Barber:** And I'm Kirsten!

**Julia:** And you're listening to the NCDPS Safety Scoop, a podcast sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

**Kirsten:** NCDPS is the largest department in the North Carolina state government with some amazing programs and resources...

**Julia:** ...as well as phenomenal personnel and volunteers.

**Kirsten:** Listen along as we take you behind the scenes and dive into how the people, programs and resources within this department enhance the safety of the people of North Carolina—give you the scoop, if you will, of all things NCDPS.

**Julia:** NCDPS's mission is to safeguard the people of North Carolina through prevention, protection and preparation. As you listen to this podcast, we hope you'll learn something you may not have known about the ways the people of NCDPS are working to keep our state safe.

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## Season 1 Episode 6

**Julia:** In honor of African American Heritage Month, today on Safety Scoop, we're talking to three DPS employees about the heritage that helped to shape them and role models who inspired them. We'll hear who and what inspired them to pursue a career in public safety.

In her role as Chief Deputy Secretary for Administration in the Department of Public Safety, Cassandra Skinner-Hoekstra oversees Human Resources,

budgetary issues, Legislative Affairs, purchasing and logistics, Information Technology, Central Engineering, Victim Services and the Governor's Crime Commission. Previously, Chief Deputy Secretary Hoekstra served in a number of agencies as either legal or legislative council or both. Welcome, San!

**CDS Cassandra Skinner-Hoekstra:** Thank you.

**Julia:** As Commander of the North Carolina Highway Patrol, Colonel Glenn McNeil oversees more than 1,600 troopers who enforce traffic laws on nearly 80,000 miles of state-maintained roads. A military veteran, McNeil has served in various leadership positions during his 25+ years with the Patrol, including overseeing the Training Academy *and* Special Operations. Welcome, Colonel.

**Col. Glenn McNeil:** Thank you.

**Julia:** Though Maxine Evans-Armwood began her career with the department in 1988, her advocacy for youth began even before that when she served as a social worker in Nash and Edgecombe counties. In her 30+ years working in the juvenile justice system, Miss Evans-Armwood has worked as a court counselor at the local, regional and administrative levels. She now serves as the Director of Court Services and as such oversees a staff of more than 500 who annually provide intake, case management, supervision services for thousands of youth involved in court treatment and/or community services. Welcome, Maxine!

**Dir. Maxine Evans-Armwood:** Thank you for letting me be here.

**Julia:** We appreciate all of you joining us!

**Kirsten:** Can you guys tell us about a notable African American who personally or historically inspired you and why. What about them has helped to set you on the trajectory that led you to your current career, or how did their position, guidance, tutelage shape and inspire you? Maxine, let's start with you.

**Maxine:** Well, it's hard to just identify one person. I have a—a number of role models, and they have certainly inspired me and allowed me to grow, but most notably is my father. Uh, he was really extremely busy and wanted to make sure that we, his children, got an education. And so, it was important to us that we study hard, that we did what we were supposed to do and also, uh, obtain our education.

Unfortunately, my father passed in 1968, and so several other people stepped up in the community who helped me grow, helped me have the opportunities, and most notably were several of my, uh, elementary teachers. They saw something in me where they were able to come and reach out to me and be able to help me grow and continue that love for education. I had one specific teacher who, not only was she my mentor, but she also took me in. I would go and visit her home on weekends and had the opportunity to go and learn even more from her, but also be able to go out and experience different environments, not just my own environment, which was absolutely awesome to

me, and I was able to also get outside of *my* community and be able to go and experience other areas in the community.

**Kirsten:** She sounds like she definitely went above and beyond her professional calling.

**Maxine:** She most certainly did, and I truly appreciate her.

**Julia:** What a great story and testament for all teachers out there.

**Kirsten:** Definitely. Colonel McNeil, what about you?

**Col. McNeil:** For me, there have been numerous, but I would have to say it all began with the unfortunate loss of my mother, Ethel Johnson McNeil, in 1981. Her loss set forth a dream for me wanting to be in law enforcement and to work in this public safety realm and to become a North Carolina state trooper. I grew up in Reidsville, North Carolina on Winstead Street, and the adage of “it takes a village” was truly at play in my neighborhood. There were wonderful neighbors who all had a profound impact on my life. All of these folks within my neighborhood, after we lost my mom, they all became motherly figures to me.

But I’d always had a love for wanting to work in law enforcement, so as it would work out, I was able to apply and was accepted into the Patrol after completing my tour of duty in the military. And I happened to meet who would ultimately become my mentor in the late Colonel Richard Holden. He was, in my eyes, a larger-than-life figure. He spent and took a great deal of time with me. And especially me having the opportunity as a trooper to witness how he carried himself, his command presence, how he led with integrity, all the lessons learned that he went through being a trailblazer for our organization. Colonel Holden was one of the first members in our organization, a group of six, to join the Highway Patrol as an African American. He was a first in most aspects of every promotion that he received. He had a huge heart. And how he viewed himself, he wasn't just the commander of black troopers, he was the commander of all members of our organization, and he took his duties and responsibility very seriously. So, having him to be one of my mentors, it's an honor and a privilege, and he has greatly helped me regarding the trajectory of where I sit as Commander of the Patrol.

**Julia:** And he *was* the first curn—the first African American Colonel.

**Col. McNeil:** Yes, ma’am, he was.

**Julia:** What an awesome story.

**Col. McNeil:** Thank you.

**Kirsten:** And San, what about you?

**CDS Hoekstra:**

So, I have to say that my personal inspiration, that person who inspired me more than any other, I think would have to be my father. My dad was 10th of 12 children. He grew up in very rural Mississippi. He was the first of his siblings to go to school, put himself through school, uh, became an electrical engineer. My dad had this can-do, "I can do anything" attitude. Not an arrogance, but just a self-confidence. And he instilled that in me and my brother. He expected us to do well. It wasn't—it—it wasn't an added pressure, per se, but he really did believe in us, and he expected us to do well. And with that kind of confidence placed in me, it really did inspire me to do my best. I think but for my father, I would not have come out of my shell. I was such a shy child, but he gave me the confidence to—to move forward and—and—and do some of the things that I've been able to do.

So, from a personal standpoint, he was my, uh, inspiration. I've also had the good fortune to work with Judge Timmons-Goodson. Uh, when I clerked for her, when she was on the Court of Appeals, she was a mentor to all of her clerks. I saw myself in her. She said that she saw herself in me. And working so closely with someone that looks like you, it makes a difference, and you really do see your potential in that person. And she really did push us all to, um, strive for our best and to, uh, to reach our potential. So, I'm very, very grateful to her and for that experience.

**Julia:**

That's awesome, and I think that's—I think what you said is so key. To have someone who looks like you to be able to lead and to look up to is huge.

**Kirsten:**

Within your home or within your workplace, how do you celebrate your heritage? And San, we're going to start with you.

**CDS Hoekstra:**

Okay. Well, I have recently made a concerted effort to learn more about myself and about my family, about my family's history. I have become obsessed with [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com).

[All laugh]

I, um, I spend a lot of time on that, uh, researching, uh, both sides of my family. I, um, I had my DNA tested to find out more about the regions of Africa where my family originated. And just spending time with my older aunts and uncles to learn about those experiences that they had. That's how we enjoy spending our time with family, and, uh, the more I learn about my history, the more I appreciate, um, all the opportunities that I've been afforded.

**Kirsten:**

And it's amazing—you say [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)—the—all the resources that we have now to learn more about those who came before us.

**CDS Hoekstra:**

Yes.

**Kirsten:**

Whereas, you know, even maybe 10, 20 years ago, all you really had were your family members. So, if they didn't know, you didn't know.

**CDS Hoekstra:** Right.

**Kirsten:** And you just passed along the stories that they told. So, it's really great that we have all these resources now that we can learn, and we have so much more to pass on to those who come after us. Maxine, what about you? How do you celebrate?

**Maxine:** Working with other young ladies. When I was younger, I was able to be a member of Big Sisters, Big Brothers program, and I've mentored several young ladies in that program, and—and I've tried to model what I—what I would like for others to do, especially my—my daughter. Unbeknownst to *me*, when she went to college, she joined the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program, and she's still mentoring young ladies today.

We have this tradition of service, of providing that service to others, and to help those who may be less fortunate than—than we are. We've had some opportunities that our families didn't have, and so we have used that to benefit us, and I'm so proud of her that she's taken on that same tradition of reaching out and helping others. And so, that inspires me to continue with some of the young ladies that I work with personally or I associate with personally. They have come back to me and said, you know, "I appreciate you being in my life for your inspiration to me." So, having that opportunity to make a difference has really helped me grow and helped me look at that—look at the fact that I have the ability to reach down and help people and—and work with them, that we can all grow together. You know, I—I used to go to a lot of events during Martin Luther King Day, but now I do it and I provide a service. Not just going to hear a speech, but I—I like the fact that I'm able to give back, and that's important to me.

**Kirsten:** That's awesome. And Colonel McNeil?

**Col. McNeil:** Well, first let me say, I'm inspired by the two panelists that we have here.

[All laugh]

And I love what I'm hearing. For me, leading our organization, coaching, mentoring and development are key pillars of my leadership philosophy. And the mentoring piece is because I've had some outstanding mentors. But someone who touched my life recently that I'll humbly share with you is a few months ago, one of our retirees, her name is Janet Sadowski. She no longer lives in North Carolina. She met with me at a Patrol function, and she said, "Can I have 15 minutes of your time?" And so, we meet, and I said, "Okay, I'm listening." But you know, she had taken the time, ancestry.com, public records, and she did my family tree.

**Various:** Oh wow!

**Col. McNeil:** It was phenomenal. She had my mother's death certificate, my parents' marriage license, birth certificates of great-great-grandparents. It was the most awesome gift of time, attention and love that I had ever received from someone whom I didn't expect it. So, how you talk about your father and your neighborhood, and I'm just—just glad to be a part of this. But what I have been given, I feel like I need to be doing...

[Clink]

...the same thing in return. I believe in mentoring, and I will tell everybody within our organization and outside it, I'm willing to share with you the blessings that I have received over my life. And Miss Janet, to her it may have been dates on a piece of paper, but the level of detail that she went through. She went and requested public records going back to the 1800s from the various counties that my family was from, and the responses that you—that she received, it was so neat. And she gave it to me in a book, and I made copies of it and sent it to all of my family. And as soon as they got it, they called, and we cried together.

**Kirsten:** Aww!

**Col. McNeil:** And we talked about, “Hey, did you remember this, and did you see this?” So, it's just—just phenomenal.

Being a black male, I take great pride in who I am, and especially being the father of three black children. The state observance of Martin Luther King, the service that we have, I look forward to going to it *every* single year, and I will not miss it for anything in the world. I also look for opportunities to take my children to black history events. This Saturday, there is a—an event that will take place in Cary, and Chief Justice Cheri Beasley is the guest speaker. So, I will be in attendance and taking my family there to support not only her, but to be a part of this awesome occasion. So, that's how I celebrate my heritage.

**Kirsten:** What a touching story. That took my breath away.

[Laughs]

**CDS Hoekstra:** Yeah.

**Kirsten:** That someone would go to that much effort just to show their appreciation. Like everyone has said, it's a community effort, and it all kind of circles back.

**Col. McNeil:** I forgot to mention: It did make me cry.

**Kirsten:** Oh!

[All laugh]

**Col. McNeil:** So, I'm very thankful that Miss Janet asked me to meet with her in private.

[All laugh]

Because, but you know, it was a labor of love, and why would somebody do that? Spend all that time and effort for somebody else? It was really touching.

**Kirsten:** Wow, what a great story. So, what do you hope to leave as your legacy to others who see you as Chief Deputy Secretary or as Colonel or Director of Juvenile Court Services?

**CDS Hoekstra:** What do I hope to leave? I, um, I—I know it sounds cliché, but I really, I want to pay it forward. I've had, uh, so many mentors, and I've had so many opportunities, blessings, throughout my career, and I want to be able to help others, young people growing up, um, or with an interest in the legal profession or in public service, uh, to—to mentor them, to assist them in their—in the pursuit of their career, whatever that might be.

I have recently been working with a young man that I happened to meet at—at a wedding, and he was just very impressive to me. He had so much passion for, um, public health and—and helping others, and I said, “You really ought to consider a job or a profession in public service.” And reached out to folks here and, um, elsewhere in the governor's office, and he was able to do some work as an intern there. And, um, that experience has really inspired him to continue, um, in public service. We will—I expect that we will see him in the future in, uh, one of these leadership roles. He's—he's that bright and that, um, he just has a lot to offer and a real just passion for helping people.

**Kirsten:** Colonel McNeil?

**Col. McNeil:** Well first of all, I would like to hope that I've made the organization better than how I inherited it. But over a 19-month period, the Highway Patrol has lost and had the unfortunate occurrence of burying five State Troopers. You could not have planned for such an ordeal. Whether intentional or not, one of my highest priorities is, how I will, I have and I'll continue to support the families of these lost members. I have become extremely close with spouses, the children that they have had and their parents that forever grieve the loss of their sons. I would have never thought that I would have the opportunity to connect with these families the way I have, but you know, we have always taken great pride in being a family.

**Kirsten:** Thank you. And Maxine?

**Maxine:** I just had a meeting last week with all my managers for Court Services, and one of the things that I challenged them to do is to become that just one for a child. For a child to be able to say, “You made a difference in my life,” and just think about if each one of us touched the lives of children and families and become that just one for that child, how important that is for a child *and* the awesome things that we can do within Court Services. We have the opportunities of

working with children, their families, the community, and I want us to take hold of that opportunity, be able to use that opportunity to help another child, another person, be successful.

And the feeling that you get when I go to the grocery store, and I see this young man who brought his daughters, and I had almost a four-hour intake with him. Uh, there was no charges brought against them, but they came in for a consultation. He needed help with his daughters. And when I go into the grocery store, and I see him occasionally, and he comes up to me every time he sees me and say, "Thank you. You know, my children are not perfect, but one is a schoolteacher. One works at the bank. And I remember what you said to them, what you said to us as a family. How we can continue to work together as a family and continue to grow as a family." And he just loves telling me that story every time I see him. And I love hearing it because I know somewhere deep down that I touched his family, and he wants to say, "thank you for what you done." I want all of our court counselors across the state to be able to have that just one success story where you made a great impact on a child's life or a parent's life and that you were able to inspire them to help others and help themselves and help them live their dream, have the opportunity to live their dreams.

**Julia:** Well, you've each shared some stories. We've been talking about African American heritage, and you've each shared very personal stories about others who have inspired you, in many cases *not* relatives, whether teachers or friends or former colleagues or neighbors. *But* why do you feel it is important to focus on African American history and to pay special attention to African American history?

**Col. McNeil:** Awesome and great question. As an African American, as a black male, you have to understand our history. And here in America, our history has not always been kind to black people. And as a proud father of three black children, I want my children to always see people that look like me, to look like them, succeed. History books haven't been so kind to show the accomplishments of people that look like me and to look like...

**Julia:** [Unintelligible] has been left out.

**Col. McNeil:** Yes, and so, you know, I have to approach it and look like—look at it from the standpoint if we don't celebrate us, no one else will. And I'm going to do just that: make sure that I—I celebrate the accomplishments of people that look like me.

**Kirsten:** San?

**CDS Hoekstra:** What the Colonel said. You know, I—I think I would, um, only add to that that unfortunately, not only is—have—have African Americans had a very difficult, and in many ways ugly history, unfortunately, a number of the images that you see of African Americans even today are not very positive ones. And to be able to

show young men and women not just African American men and women, I think it's important because it's all of America's history. It's not just black history. But to show them the—the contributions that, uh, African Americans have made to this country and how we have had some extraordinary individuals in our history, that can inspire them. And it—it—it helps to give them a—a clear, a more accurate picture of, um, who and what we are as, uh, African Americans. And so, studying our history is important to—to counterbalance, if you will, or negate a lot of the negative images that are out there of African Americans.

**Maxine:** Based on what the Colonel has said and San has said, you know, our history is important. It helps me grow and feel a sense of achievement when I have others, Court Counselors or other folks in the community, that are happy to see someone who looks like them. So often, they've not had that opportunity to work with, to be around or have someone that they want to look up to or they feel they can look up to. And so, I want to be that person, but I also want to continue to reach back and help them grow, help mentor those because that's a big part of African American history is helping each other.

**Julia:** Thank you for sharing that. You each have kind of touched on something and that, um, from what I've heard you say, part of African American Heritage Month or Black History Month is to share the rest of the story that for so long has been left out. And you mentioned it, Colonel, in the history books, and San, you touched on it as well, that, you know, many of us didn't grow up really learning the whole American history because we only learned part of the story, and we didn't hear the rest of the story. And I'm so glad that my children and others are now hearing that and getting a fuller picture of—of the reality, and it's not always pretty. Um, sometimes it has been very cruel, but we can learn from it.

**Kirsten:** Wrapping up, are there any challenges, successes or defining moments that you'd like to share with our listeners about your experience as African Americans working within DPS?

**Maxine:** One thing that I have done when I've gone to our Basic Training graduations, and these are new staff members who are coming on board, is that there are opportunities. There are opportunities within DPS, and I want them to know about the opportunities. So often, they don't hear about them, or so much later in life that—that they become aware of some of the opportunities. So, I've challenged them to learn about the opportunities that—that's available to them. I want them to know about them. If they don't know about it, then they're not able to, um, obtain some of the benefits of those promotional opportunities, so I want to make sure that they are aware of those.

**CDS Hoekstra:** Defining moments... I—I think the ability that this position has allowed me to mentor some of the, um, some of the managers that work in the division and see them grow. African Americans, people of all races actually, just to see them grow as managers, to see them grow into their role, uh, to fulfill their potential

in this department and—and contribute to our mission. So, I'd have to say that would be the defining moment or success for me.

**Kirsten:** That's awesome. And Colonel McNeil?

**Col. McNeil:** My defining moment was a kick in the butt. One of my—my mentors whom retired from the Highway Patrol many years ago, early on in my career, he came to me. We had a conversation, and I won't name his name, but he said, "Glenn, you are a hard worker," he said, "but you have two strikes against you." He says, "Number one: you are black." He said, "Number two: you don't have any education." And he said, "One of those two you cannot change, so what are you going to do about it?" And to hear that from him crushed me, but I knew I had to get to work. And so, I started going to school at night. And the degrees that I have now, I attribute it to him having kicked me in the butt. And after my first degree, he came to my graduation ceremony, and he shared with me that education is the great equalizer. I would encourage everyone, get your education because it will open up so many doors that you never thought would be available to you.

**Kirsten:** Well, thank you everyone for coming out and recording this episode of the Safety Scoop. Thanks for joining us.

**Col. McNeil:** Thank you.

**CDS Hoekstra:** Thank you.

## **Conclusion**

[Music]

**Kirsten:** Thanks for listening to this episode of the Safety Scoop. To learn more about NCDPS, go to [ncdps.gov](http://ncdps.gov). Tune in next time on your favorite podcast app to hear more behind-the-scenes stories from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

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