Michael Eure Show – Episode 52: Female First Responders

INTRODUCTION: Hello, this is Michael Eure, and I'd like to invite you to the Michael EURE Show, featuring student hosts and very special guest talking about a variety of interesting topics. You can find this on the Eagle Stream YouTube channel.

MICHAEL EURE: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Michael Eure Show. I would ask all of our guests to mute your mics, if you don't mind, for a minute. I want to thank you for participating, and today, our show is focused on women first responders. And I'm gonna have them introduce themselves at, and right now, I've already said my name is Michael Eure, and we're gonna go right around, and I'm gonna call each person, and we'll start with you, Jerry.

JERRY GREENE: Hi, my name is Jerry Greene. It's my second year at Wake Tech. I'm majoring in cybersecurity, and I've been participating in these virtual mixes alongside my peer here.

EURE: Thank you. Stacy?

STACY KIZER: Hi, my name is Stacy Kizer. This is my first semester at Wake Tech, and my major is psychology.

EURE: Thank you. Johnette?

JOHNETTE SMITH: Good afternoon everybody. I'm Johnette Smith. I'm a career coach under our senior, Senior Director Laura Bethea and our career exploration under Career Services.

EURE: And I wanted to say thank you to Career Services for, this is the third event we've done in collaboration with them, and they help us get some very special guests. And we're gonna have them introduce themselves now. Kim?

KIM MILLER: Good afternoon. My name is Kim Miller, and I am a paramedic instructor here at Wake Tech.

EURE: Constance?

CONSTANCE BEST: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Constance Best, and I'm a full-time faculty instructor here at Wake Tech.

EURE: And I'm thinking I'm getting this right. We're gonna go with Tara Overton first.

TARA OVERTON: Good afternoon. My name is Tara Overton. I'm the public safety coordinator and also instructor here at Wake Tech.

EURE: And we saved the last because she is the woman that runs that campus, Public Safety, Dr. Jamie Wicker.

JAMIE WICKER: Good afternoon. I'm Jamie Wicker. I'm the provost and chief campus officer, Public Safety Education and Training [Division], Public Safety Education Campus, and I'm delighted to be here. Thank you.

EURE: All right, and I think Sara's gonna take us to the side and play a brief video that Johnette Smith has provided. Or did you wanna speak first Johnette?

SMITH: No, I'll let the video speak for itself.

EURE: Thank you.

VIDEO: We are Wake Tech Career Services. We have career specialists and career coaches that can assist you with every aspect of your job search: career and professional development, preparing for your job search. We have career specialists that can assist our curriculum students and alumni with resume and cover letter writing, interview skill building, social media checkups, job search strategies and tips for maintaining employment. For our current students and alumni, you have access to a database of internships and jobs. Career exploration, our career coaches are here to help you with the career exploration process. Do you need help clarifying your career goals? Maybe you're undecided about your college major or program of study. Maybe you are ready to explore the next steps in your career plan. Our career coaches have the tools and resources available to guide you in the career decision-making process. Our coaches can support you in the development of a plan of action. Connect with one of our coaches today to get you started on your career journey. We would love to assist you with exploring careers. So, visit us at careers.waketech.edu and schedule a virtual or in-person appointment.

EURE: All right, thank you. And Sarah's gonna put that video in the chat so, for people that want to look at it, they will be able to. All right, we're gonna go into a little bit more detail with our special guests. So, I'm gonna ask, starting with Kim, then Constance, then Tara Overton and then, at the end, Dr. Wicker. If you could tell us a little bit more about yourselves and maybe how you became a first responder.

MILLER: So, I've been a paramedic for about almost 30 years. Next year will make 30 years. I guess I probably got more involved in, in this, I mean, I guess it was from childhood really. And the good old TV show, and I know you've heard this a million times before, but the old TV show "Emergency." As a 4-, 5-, 6-year-old kid, I watched the, I've watched that show my whole life, but I was just mesmerized with it as a kid. And then the "Rescue 911" show came along in the '80s and '90s. And even once I finished college, I got into something else. It just wasn't it, and this is where I ended up coming back to and finding my home in public safety, and EMS specifically. So, I, I guess it's been there from childhood, really.

EURE: That's good. That's interesting. Constance?

BEST: So, like Kim, mine started as a child. Back in '99, I'm sure many of you remember the flood that came in, and I was one of those families impacted. And we had 22 feet of water in our home in about 12 hours, and we went through the whole emergency evacuation, and it was really the first responders that came in and helped our family during that time of need. And it was at that moment that my career path changed.

I had every intention on going to a four-year university. Had been accepted and was gonna go, but that impact and financial impact took a hit on my family, and I wasn't gonna be able to afford a four-year university anymore at that time. So, I fell in love with fire services at a very young age, at the age of 16, started riding on a fire apparatus at that time, getting fire training and then taking my EMT classes while I was still in high school. And it was at that pivotal moment, the age of 17, where my wife actually changed toward public safety, and it has kind of geared everything that I have done, all of my career, stemming from just that childhood, you know, disaster or emergency that happened to me, and, and so, that's kind of how my path has kind of started.

EURE: Thank you. Tara?

OVERTON: So, I grew up, my father was a firefighter/EMT back in the day when it was an all-volunteer EMS agency. And he used to bring the ambulance home to our house on the weekend so if they got a call, they could respond. I knew from the time I was 14 that I

wanted to be a firefighter/paramedic. I actually started out in an Explorer post for a fire department in the town that I grew up in. I did that until my senior year in high school. I went through the recruit academy at night, and I was going to high school during the day and, to be a firefighter. And then I did five years crash fire rescue in the Air Force.

I got my EMT while I was in the Air Force. I got out. I worked as an EMT for a local critical care transport here in Wake County. And I tried nursing school, but nursing school was little too slow for me. So, I ended up finishing my paramedic degree and started working for Wake County EMS back in 2002.

EURE: Thank you. Dr. Wicker?

WICKER: Well, my path is a little different than our panelists. I, I didn't grow up around public safety, and when I went to college, I wanted to be a medical doctor. And when I started the class, I was having so much fun in college that I was, like, "Who wants to spend so much time in a lab?" So, suddenly I had to find another profession. But I didn't know what it was gonna be. So, my advisor, who gave me good advice, said, "Just take several intro classes and see what speaks to you." I was in my freshman year, and so I took several intro classes, and I loved my intro to criminal justice class. That class spoke to me. It was fun. It was something that clicked, and I just loved it. And so, I knew right off the bat this is for me. I didn't know what I was gonna do, but I knew I was gonna do something in that field.

So I became an, a major in criminal justice. I got a degree in criminal justice, came back home and I thought, "Well, do I wanna be a police officer? I'm not sure." So, I tried a few other things. I was a social worker in Children's Protective Services. I worked as an advocate for a domestic violence sexual assault agency. I even taught a little high school. And along the way, I just felt like I was around formal justice and I wanted to be a police officer. So, around that time, 9/11 occurred. Conner, when you were talking about '99 and I'm thinking about, you know, 2001 and where we were, and a lot of people were giving back in different ways. And I felt like I, I needed to help my community differently, and I really wanted to be a part of the solution.

And so, I decided to go to my local community college and enroll in Basic Law Enforcement Training, and that's what started a career in law enforcement for me. My, my fire and my EMT service is much more recent, but my primary depth experience is law enforcement.

EURE: Thank you. So, audience, you see we have some great people here with good

information. We're gonna ask some questions, but I also want to remind you, if you have questions, ask them in the chat. And I see the dean of Career Services is here. So, how are you doing, Lynn? And then we're gonna start with questions with Jerry, the first one.

GREENE: The first question is what is the current demographic makeup of first responders and Wake County?

EURE: And anybody can answer it.

OVERTON: I can speak for the EMS side of that. I'm currently still employed part time with Wake County EMS, and as of recent, the, we've got about 450ish employees that work for Wake County EMS. Currently, about a third of those employees are female. When I started with Wake County EMS back in 2002, Kim and I were actually partners for a while back then, and I think there were less than 30 females that work for Wake County EMS back in the early 2000s, late '99s.

EURE: Thank you. I was very surprised to hear that statistical information. Anybody else?

MILLER: When I started at Wake EMS in 1992 as a part-time employee and then 1993 as a full-time employee, I was one of six females that worked for the whole organization. So, it had expanded a bit when Tara had gotten there, but we were still significantly the minority.

BEST: And so, I currently work for an outside agency. I'm still part time on an ambulance. And when I first started, I was one of three females in all of my county on a truck, not only the youngest female, but I was also the only female on my shift, with a total of only three in the county at that time. And we're still at about one-third, so we're still kind of lacking in that area.

EURE: OK.

WICKER: I have a little information about law enforcement and fire. In the fire service generally, this is excluding Raleigh Fire Department and Cary Fire Department, but in general, in Wake County, you have about 3 percent female firefighters. And fire service typically is a little bit, tends to be a little lower percentage of females in the, in the industry than males, and there's complex reasons for that probably. In law enforcement, we are around 10 percent, and again, this is, not every agency is represented in that, but just in very general terms, about 10 percent. So, EMS does have a generally higher percentage of, of women.

When I first started in public safety and law enforcement, I was one of three at an agency that had female officers, and that was a high percentage because other agencies that I would have applied to, I would have been probably the only female or there would have been 100 officers, and I would have still been one of three. So, used to being in a very small minority.

EURE: OK. Thank you. And now, the next question Stacy is gonna ask. And all, I appreciate all those answers. Stacy, unmute. Oh, she faded away. Let us hope that she'll come back, but Jerry, can you do the next question?

GREENE: All right. The next question is what barriers and challenges have you faced being in a male-dominant industry? Anyone can say in any order.

MILLER: For myself, I would say one of the largest barriers, it wasn't so much filling the role as a paramedic. As long as you, there was definitely a process of proving yourself, and I'm not just talking about able to do the skills medically, I'm talking about the physical skills of lifting patients. So, I would say that probably I was a pretty strong female at 23 years old because I had to lift twice as much as the men to prove that I could do it. Once you proved yourself, then they were very willing to help.

I would also say that, along the lines of promotion is a significant hurdle. At one time, there was one female in an agency that I previously worked at and, that was in a leadership role. And for the longest time, I bet it took a decade probably before another one got into the leadership role. They were just very hesitant about allowing females in leadership roles.

EURE: Any other experience?

BEST: I have to just piggyback off what Kim just, you know, told the group that, you know, proving yourself is one thing that I think we all have to go through, and it's one of those struggles where you almost have to work twice as hard as or three times harder at your job than the average male, simply because you are female. And you do have to always be on what I call red alert, and you always have to be on you're A-game, top of the list. And you know you're sick, you can't let them see that you're sick. You don't get to be vulnerable, and you don't get to be weak because that's used against you in this type of field, in a male-dominant field.

And, you know, personally, for me, I worked on the ambulance while carrying two kids. I had

both my children back to back, and I will tell you that the moment that I decided to expand and have a family is the moment that, even then, after years of proving myself, that vulnerability and that weakness turned right back into a male-dominant field where, you know, I was looked at as I couldn't perform the duties of my job, which while being pregnant, I had even work even harder to prove that I could still do it, still lift and everything else.

And then, the other aspect that I think is really challenging is patients, is sometimes patients. If you're a female and you're the female provider on the truck, you know, sometimes they don't want to speak to you. They only want to speak to the male, even though you're the person in charge of that truck. And so, sometimes that communication is a barrier for your patients as well being a female.

WICKER: I would, I would add in from the law enforcement perspective, it's not that different. You have to prove yourself constantly. You don't get credit for anything that you come with. So, Conner, you said you have to work two or three times as hard. My mother used to say, "You have to work twice as hard to get half as much credit." And I think there's a lot of truth to that. It's, it's like, "It doesn't matter that you have 10 years in this field. I haven't seen you do it. So, because I haven't seen you do it, I don't know that you can do it." And you don't just have to prove yourself to your hierarchy or your chain of command. You have to prove yourself to the person on your left and the person on your right. And there is this, maybe that's cultural in public safety to an extent, but it certainly exists for women. I felt like it existed in my career. It's a little different now. It's not a whole, a whole lot different, but it is a little different.

I would say, in the law enforcement realm, generally speaking, I had some easier experiences with the public because of the skill set that I bring to the table. I've had some situations that were easier for me than others. But I think that people, to Kim's point, when you look at leadership and you don't see representation for yourself in leadership, then your leadership looks for everyone to act or be like they are. So, if they're males and they expect you to police the way that they police and you don't, instead of saying there's room for that and there's value in that, sometimes they look at it as you didn't do it right or you did it wrong just because you got there differently. And so, that can be a, a challenge or struggle, depending upon the culture of the agency that you're at. So, agency fit is also very important, I would say.

EURE: All right. And we have a couple of questions in the chat, and I think you answered one of them already. But this is Dr. Chris O'Riordan-Adjah, and he is the head of the

Engineering Department, Associate of Engineering, at Wake Tech. So, could you read that for us, Jerry? And I'm gonna also be asking you to do that, Johnette. I'm just letting him do this one. Go ahead.

GREENE: Dr. Chris says, "Great panel and amazing career path stories. How closely do you all work with campus police/security?"

WICKER: Oh, can I jump in on this one? I love our Campus Police Department. They're incredible. Shout-out to Chief [Michael] Penry, Sgt. [Wyatt] Cumbo and the whole team. We have an incredible Campus Police Department here, and Wake Tech is incredibly, incredibly fortunate.

We work closely with them. We provide them resources. They provide us resources. We train together. We problem-solve together. We, we're buddies. We look out for each other. We take care of each other. They take care of us. So, I would say we, we work very closely together, and, and we're here for each other, whatever we need.

EURE: All right. Thank you. And Dr. Pam Little's here, too. And we have another question from Dr. Chris, I don't know. All right. Johnette, you want to do that one?

SMITH: Absolutely, not a problem. Dr. Chris asks, "What recruiting efforts are currently in place to encourage females to participate in this rewarding field? Workshops? Seminars? Internships?"

BEST: So, I can tell you what the EMS Department is doing. The EMS Department, because we are made up with a lot of females, we are so fortunate to have as many females in, on our team as we do. We're out in the public. We're going to events. We are in the high schools. We have several recruiting options on the table that we've been exploring coming up. But, for us, it's word of mouth. It is us being out here in the communities. It's running our EMT courses at various locations all over Wake County and just that, that relationship that we're building with our students. And we're getting the word out there that we're here, and I like to call it that we're on fire because we are doing everything that we can for everyone.

And so, we want to be in the schools a little bit more. We've got a ton of things coming out that, you know, we're trying to help with recruiting, not just for Wake Tech, but for the field in general and getting our students and other people engaged and into the workforce.

EURE: OK. I'm gonna add the, oh, another question. Lisa, and I think you may have somewhat answered it, but you might want to go into more details and even talk about the males in the other agencies and how they work together with females, like the police working with EMS or the firefighters or other first responders. And I didn't let you read the question, Jerry, but please read it. Go ahead.

GREENE: How are you accepted or treated by your male peers in your field?

WICKER: I wanted to add one more thing to Conner's answer about recruitment, and then I wanna say one quick thing about being treated about males in our field. I think we beat them up a little bit in our last question, our last response, and I want to be even-handed in my answer.

But about recruitment, we also work closely with stakeholders in Wake County and in our region and across state because there's a staffing issue for public safety across the state. So, we have stakeholders who come to us for help with problem solving and staffing, and we have a wonderful partnership. In looking at diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, all of those are initiatives that you're seeing across public safety right now from a lot of perspectives. So, we are in the role of being a force multiplier then for stakeholders and for our region. And I think what you see is diversity in Wake County that maybe it doesn't exist in other places simply because we're so fortunate to have some of the resources that we have here.

So, I wanted to add that about recruitment, and then I wanted to say also about how we are treated by our male colleagues. My opinion, my experience is once people see that you're there to do the job and you're capable of doing the job, you're one of the guys. You get, you get taken care of. You get looked after. You get the same jokes. You get, you're not an outcast, but it's this [audio breaks up for 10 seconds]. … They're not gonna leave you out there to, by yourself. But once, once they realize, in, in my experience, that you're there to do your job and you're not there to just wear a T-shirt and get a paycheck, you're not just there to sit in the office, you get that respect, and you get everything that comes along with it. You get treated exceptionally well. I love, love this career field and have been treated very well and with a lot of respect.

EURE: And I, I just have another question about your, the makeup of your department at Wake Tech in particular. Do you offers certificates and specialized training as well as Associate of Applied Science degrees? And, if so, could you explain how people could get involved in either, any one of those things?

WICKER: Sure. Tara, do you wanna jump in about fire and EMS and talk a little bit about about that or about fire specifically?

OVERTON: So, I can talk a little bit about fire. I think Conner would be a much better expert to talk about what currently we have for EMS. We currently run a fire academy in Wake County that students can go to, and when they finish the academy, they'll have their Firefighter I and II [certifications] and also their EMT. They also get some technical rescue classes so that they are ready to be employed by a fire department. They have the basic certifications that they need to, to be employed by some of our smaller departments. And some of our departments have gotten to where they're actually hiring their folks and then sending them, sending them through our fire academy so that they are all being trained at the same level, same standard, all of that.

Conner can speak much more as far as our EMS programs and what we offer there. So, I'll let her handle that question.

BEST: Thank you, Tara. So, we do offer the curriculum program, which is the degree program, for Emergency Medical Sciences, but we also offer a lot of non-degree pathways that will still lead to a degree. So, on our continuing education side, or what we more like to call our Workforce Continuing Education, is, we offer several EMT classes. We tend to offer about six every semester, and that's need based, and we offer them all over Wake County.

So, we found the need that, sometimes our students are using transportation or, you know, it's not feasible for them to drive all the way to the campus that we're hosting the EMT class. So, we recently ventured around and started offering them all over Wake County, and we try to alternate which part of the county that we offered them at strategically so, that way, we make ourselves available to all of our students and all of our stakeholders here in Wake County. We also offer varying schedules. We offer online, hybrid, blended. We offer weekend. We offer nights. We are so flexible when it comes to our schedules because we know our students need that.

We also offer AEMT, so once our students finish EMT, they can take AEMT with us, which is essentially advanced EMT credential, which means you're able to do a little bit more. You get to practice a little bit more. I like to say you get to have fun a little bit more. That's a class that Ms. Kim teaches for us. She'll vouch that it's pretty fun. She'll get out there and play basketball with our students. And then we offer an AEMT to paramedic program, and this allows our students to then work their way up while working in the workforce earning a

paycheck, what I like to call and why Johnette is the earn-while-you-learn degree. So, that way, you guys can earn a paycheck, and you can get paid and get your education all at the same time. And then, lastly, you know, we offer that route to bridge you from paramedic to a degree. So, you can come in and take four classes, sometimes less, sometimes more, depending on other classes you had. And we'll give you a degree in our Emergency Medical Science Bridge program.

So, we have really created this culture and this environment to streamline different pathways to really reach into our community and pull students that this may not have been possible to before.

EURE: Y'all have some brilliant answers. I love it. And I'm gonna ask some more questions, but right now, let's see if we can get Laura Bethea, because she has one. You wanna read that Johnette, since that's somebody you know? Jerry knows her, too.

SMITH: I'd love to. "What practical advice would you offer to a female student interested in your career fields or a brand new graduate heading into your fields of work?" That's part one. Part two is, "What should be considered or avoided?"

EURE: And I think that anybody or all of you can answer that question about the careers. What, what practical advice?

OVERTON: I'll speak to that one a little bit. I would say make sure that you are physically fit, that you are actually capable of doing the job, doing the lifting, doing the moving. This isn't just a class, a career where you go to class and, and you learn about things in class. You actually have to be able to provide and do the skills and the activities associated with it. So, you've got to be physically fit and, and, and have some strength to you. A lot of agencies have gotten to where they require physical agility tests to get hired, fire departments, EMS agencies, and it's the same test, regardless of whether you're male or female. So, you have to be, you know, ready for that physical component. And like we've all said, you've gotta work twice as hard and, and do twice as good as your, your fellow male employees.

EURE: Anybody else?

BEST: My advice is simple. Never give up, never stop and never let anyone tell you that you can't do it. You can. Anyone can.

EURE: All right. I would like to say congratulations on your great innovation. I love the fact that you're going out in these communities and providing the services, and I, I'm certain that the diversity is gonna improve and you're gonna lift some people.

And I didn't ask you about how much money people make, but if somebody could kind of venture to tell me a little bit about the salaries.

WICKER: The money's in EMS. There's no money in policing or fire, hardly.

OVERTON: I think what Dr. Wicker may be referring to is Wake County just passed this week a pay raise for all EMS personnel. So, basic EMTs are starting at a pay rate of $20 an hour. Advanced EMTs, I can't remember, I wanna say it's $23, and then paramedics are starting at $28 an hour. So, as a fresh out of school paramedic, if you get hired by Wake County EMS, you're making $28 an hour, which is very, very good money for a public safety career.

EURE: Anybody else?

WICKER: I was going to say, law enforcement, you can look at about high $30,000s to mid $40,000s as a starting salary, depending upon where you are. So, even, even smaller areas are catching up to that around $40,000 a year pay band.

BEST: And so, my only advice, and I tell this to all students, is the money, the money is, is not great always. It's getting there and it's getting better through education and training. So, we do what we do because we love what we do. We love the impact that we have on our patients and our community and the career itself and saving lives and helping. And, you know, I say we're a lot of things. We're a social worker. We're, you know, a friend. We're a neighbor. We're so much more than just an EMT or just a paramedic, and it is one of the most rewarding careers, being in public safety, that anyone could ever have. So, sometimes it's not always just about the money. It's truly about the outcome and what you get from it.

WICKER: Some practical advice that I would give is find an agency that's a good fit for you. So, there is a place for everyone who wants to work in public safety. There is a place that is a fit for you. Everybody can do something, and there is a fit. So, find a good culture fit that matches with how you want to be treated, that has the advancement that you're looking for, that the community reflects where you want to be. If you feel passionate about this career, because there will be hard days, and sometimes that's just what keeps you going and this is, this is the place you fit.

And, and then, the other thing that I would say is try to find somebody that you can learn from. You can learn from everybody. You can learn what not to do from people or how you don't want to be. But try to find somebody that can give you that good advice because, in law enforcement and public safety overall, there will be questions that you'll want to ask somebody, but you won't want to ask your boss. So, find somebody that you can ask these questions to and can give you some advice.

And, and the last thing that I would say for general practical advice is you don't have to be anybody else to be good enough to contribute in public safety. Just be yourself and show up as a person, as a human, not as a uniform, because whatever entity of, of public safety you're working in, you're gonna be dealing with people at their worst possible moment. And you're not there to judge. You are there to help. So, if you can think about, "I'm a person helping a person" through this lens, I think that is practical advice that has helped me survive a career in law enforcement.

EURE: Thanks for those very thoughtful answers. And you're leading me into something that I participated in last week or the week before, which is mental health first aid training that Wake Tech is offering to their faculty and staff. And so, we have a question in the chat from Josie George about mental health. So, could you ask, ask that, Jerry?

GREENE: Josie George says, "How do you handle the risks for developing mental health problems after handling difficult situations on a daily basis?"

BEST: The dinner table. All problems are solved at our dinner table. We don't get long, and it gets interrupted, but we're family, and we come together, and we eat dinner together. We sit at the table, and that is where all the problems are solved in EMS, fire and I'm pretty sure law enforcement. I don't know. Maybe in the patrol car and maybe next to one another, but that is where all problems are solved. You know, we all go through the same thing, and we all kind of piggyback off of those experiences, and we communicate and talk. We cry, we laugh, we joke. But we go through that together, and I think that's what makes us stronger.

MILLER: I would say one of the, I married someone in law enforcement, so we had the, I wouldn't say the privilege, but we had, our jobs brought us together a lot of times on scenes together, and some very horrific scenes together. And as Conner said, the dinner table was, sometimes it was the breakfast table that we talked things out and, and really didn't give it a whole lot more thought. So, I would think one of the, I, I would advise one of the biggest things to do is don't let the stuff fester. You know, unlike a soldier that goes and fights for our country and comes back in a year and maybe goes back again, that's a lot of

fast things they saw. But for us, it's spread over a 30-year career. So, don't let these things fester.

When something you see bothers you, then you, you need to start talking about it immediately with someone, and I think that agencies have gotten a lot better at recognizing mental health. Back when I first started EMS, you didn't talk about how a call bothered you. You were a weakling if you did that. But now, a lot of agencies, and I've only worked for a few, but I think that they're all getting better at recognizing, "You know what? Maybe we do need to offer our employees somewhere to go to talk about these things." And then just do things you enjoy when you're off work. That's, you've gotta have an outlet. You can't work all the time.

EURE: We're gonna try to do a couple of comments, if we could, and then we're gonna ask a few more questions. And we have Sarah in the background putting the comments out there. So, this is Garla Glover Smith. Jerry?

GREENE: Garla says, "These are excellent stating, these are excellent starting wages offered by our county."

EURE: All right. Monica, and I always get her name wrong, but I know exactly where she is. Is it Jefferling? Go ahead, Jerry. I'm just letting Jerry go ahead and read these questions.

SMITH: It's Gemperlein. Monica Gemperlein.

EURE: Gemperlein? Gemperlein? OK. Did it go away? Oh my. All right. Laura Bethea again. "Self-care is very important." And I hope we can bring Monica back up because we didn't get to read hers. OK, Jerry.

GREENE: She says, "Wonderful advice. Thank you all for sharing their honest, practical information."

EURE: Thank you, Monica. All right. So, now we have another question, and I don't wanna make it seem like I'm working Jerry to death, but if you could read the next question that we have to developed for this group.

GREENE: What future, what future changes would you like to see with EMS or other related professions?

EURE: Anybody?

BEST: I know, for me, some of the changes that I want to see is I wanna see more pathways, more opportunities, higher pay. We're seeing that now in our, in our own county, and I will tell you, Wake County is leading the way in the pay across the state now since this new pay increase. And I would just like for the word to get out there: Open up advancement opportunities and open up mentor opportunities. And Wake County EMS has a cadet program that Tara was speaking about with everyone earlier, and having opportunities for our younger students to see what all EMS is about and what we have to offer. And then, because we're in education, you know, we wanna look at advancement opportunities. We wanna look at that, our different agreements between four-year universities and being able to align our degrees, you know, across multiple different universities and, you know, really expanding our career.

And, you know, while I'll say, "Yes, I want more women in our field," I do, I do definitely want more women in our field, but I want more people in general. It, it doesn't necessarily have to be women. You know, we're suffering a shortage right now, and, you know, we need first responders in our area in all fields. That's, that's what I hope leads for our future.

WICKER: I'd like to see a change in our response styles generally. I think that we tend to respond in police the way we have for years and years and years, and I'd really like to see police, fire, EMS, public safety in general, move forward in our response styles. And that's not, the things that I would like to see changed aren't necessarily in a vacuum to change. They're, they're complex, multi-faceted and difficult. But I would love to see more of a multidisciplinary team approach to calls at times when that's safe to do so.

I also think that, when we look at recruitment, we look at women in first responder roles, everything that, that my fellow panelists have said I agree with. However, I think that the industry needs to determine, you know, we talk about what, how we respond to the community: "The community has to say what they want us to do." But similar, we have to decide what we want us to do. So, when you want more women in law enforcement, for example, you want more women in the fire service, your shift is 24 hours a day. You work 24 hours, and that's hard for somebody who has a family or has kids or a single mom or somebody trying to go to school. It can be tough when you're having to balance priorities. So, if you're brand new and you're 18, and you don't have a family or you don't have any other priorities, then, that, you can dedicate that time to it. But when you start looking at, "I got kids I gotta get on and off the bus," or any other thing you have to do, these shifts become difficult. And I think that, as a profession, I would like to see us be more creative

and problem-solving toward how can we make these professions more open for different groups of people that we're having trouble with recruiting. It's not necessarily that people aren't interested. It's some things we can look at to do differently as a profession.

EURE: I think that was probably the best answer I've heard in quite some while about this particular issue. I'm gonna try to ask Johnette if she can kind of tell us about Career Services because I'm always sending students there because they don't always take the right major and Wake Tech has so many ways to enter and exit. And I really like that about Dr. Ralls. He respects all of the students, no matter what they're trying to do. And so tell us some of the things you can do to help them, and I know that you're doing right now. Johnette. I know I put you on the spot, but can you do that real quick?

SMITH: It's OK. I was kind of expecting, but it's OK. So, just to give just this little one, just again, to kind of reiterate what we do, especially in career exploration. We enable students to gain insight into potential careers. Students learn what skills are necessary for a particular career, the education that is required for that. We also help them to look into the profession or being a part of what that would look like for them. There are tools that we use to help them decide what their best fit would be. [Audio breaks up for 1 second] … that we saw already in that little clip that will help them assess what the best fit would be for them. With this information, imagine them in the career that, that will suit, and then we encourage them to develop and work toward those career goals. So, a lot of what the career coaches are doing, again, is to help to develop and create those career paths, again.

EURE: Thank you. And I think of the career coaches as cousins to the success coaches. We work very close. I did wanna ask the question about the transferability of your degrees, and could you give a couple of maybe pathways that a student could get a four-year degree after completing your program? And any particular schools you want to shout out, do that, too.

WICKER: I'm gonna jump in here first because Criminal Justice hasn't been incredibly represented on the panel. I feel like I need to represent them. So, we have articulation agreements beyond our AAS for Criminal Justice Technology. We are expanding articulation agreements. We have several that are in progress right now for all of our curriculum areas. We have some that connect even up to graduate degrees.

But I wanna also highlight, I know this wasn't exactly your question, Michael, but I think it speaks to where we're going with Reach and Rally and the great vision that we have of our Board of Trustees, Dr. Ralls and our executive leadership team. We also have a way to

connect people prior to the curriculum, through Workforce Con Ed, through credit for prior learning. So, what I, what I really wanna answer to your question is, A, anyone who wants to get in public safety anywhere, wherever they are, wherever they're coming from, we can hook you up, and B, we can create a customized, a customized path for you with our success coaches and career coaches to get you wherever you need to go, wherever you want to go.

So, we have several established pathways and several more that we are establishing through, all the way through graduate degrees, from zero to graduate degrees. I, high school, we are working on multiple, multiple options, too many to list. But I'll let my other panelists jump in if they have something they want to shout out.

MILLER: I was fortunate and, excuse me, I was fortunate enough to be able to transfer. I'm also a graduate of Wake Tech. I graduated back in the early '90s. I was able to transfer my associate degree to Western Carolina University and get my bachelor's degree from Western Carolina, and I went the Emergency Management route rather than the EMS route. But I know a lot of people who have gone the Emergency Medical Care, I think is what the degree is at Western Carolina. I also then was able to transition over and get my master's degree in Emergency Management also. So, Wake Tech was an excellent launching pad for that career path or that education pathway.

BEST: And just to piggyback off that, I think, no matter what pathway you choose here at Wake Tech, you, there's a ton of transfer opportunities for you. And what I like to advise students when they come in is, you know, you're not just stuck in this one field. You're not just stuck in fire, EMS, law enforcement. You know, we, we want you to branch out and look at other avenues and, you know, make yourself more employable and, you know, get experience in other areas and, what I like to say, make you, make yourself well-rounded. And they can go into Business Administration, Health Care Administration, Public Safety. You know, we, we see a variance of different pathways that come out just from starting in a mere foundation from the community college and we try to make them aware the sky's the limit. Let's, let's start this and use it as a stepping stone, and let's, let's venture around to the opportunities that we have available for you.

EURE: Y'all are reaching and rallying. We, we really are excited about the opportunities to share with the community and we would certainly support whatever way we can. And we're down to like our last two minutes, so we're gonna kind of let everybody do some closing statements and tell us whatever you wanna say that we may not have covered. Audience, if you have more questions, you can ask them in the chat. They won't necessarily get

answered today, but the, the individuals will have an opportunity to get back with you. So, we'll start with Jerry.

SMITH: And if I may, really quickly, Michael, if it's in your closing statement, if you could express the most rewarding part about your job as [indecipherable]. That would be great.

EURE: OK. Well, I'll do that real quick right now. My, my job, I love being a success coach. In fact, when I got hired at Wake Tech, I, I just didn't think that it was possible because they were, they created a position that allowed me to do what I was doing at another school for extra. You know, helping students to get successful. They were becoming disenchanted, and they were just, just thinking they couldn't finish. And so, that's what we do, and so, I love seeing students not just finish Wake Tech, but move on and do other great things, but also take advantage of all the resources that Wake Tech has. We have scholarships. We have Career Services. We have all these different majors that, I am always amazed when I talk to students, and they thought they wanted to major in one thing but, and I'm gonna use computer science, for an example. They would take computer science, and then we put them in Associate of Engineering. They didn't like math. They didn't want to take physics. They didn't know had on Web Design and Cybersecurity and all of those IT programs. And I'm sure that that might be the case for some people that are saying they wanna be transferring to four-year schools that might wind up much better served in some of the programs you have. And so, I think that making more people aware and just connecting the dots, that's my job, that's my passion in life in and out of Wake Tech. So, now we're going to go to you, Jerry.

GREENE: My closing statement is not going to be that long. I know me personally, I'm majoring in Cybersecurity, and I don't really have anybody close to me who's in, like, the first responder field, so being able to learn more and hear more about what everybody goes through and that is really interesting to me.

EURE: OK. Johnette?

SMITH: So, again, as a career coach, I, first of all, thank you so much for this wonderful show. I can't express how much this team coming together and being part of the show has meant to Career Services, of course, to just across the college has been watching your experience, sharing each of that has been most rewarding to me, and even today. But as a career coach, I have to piggyback with Michael in that helping students connect the dots, I actually smile from ear to ear when I see a student actually realizing what they want to do. I tell them often, "When you talk about jobs, sometimes that's just above the surface."

Right? Sometimes, we're talking about just wanting to make ends meet. But when they talk about career, and they talk about passion, and they talk about what is the best fit for them, I smile because I know they're on the right path. And so, being able to connect those dots was definitely much rewarding. But again, to each of you, thank you so much for sharing.

EURE: I know. And we're going just a teeny bit over, but we're gonna move fast. So, we'll start with you, Kim.

MILLER: Thank you again for the opportunity to come. This, this has been awesome. Also, I would say it starts with don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone. I eventually left Emergency Management and went to critical care transport, and I had the opportunity to fly. Then, I stepped out of that and, and got into high school education. Now, I've got a few really young people out there that are gonna take my place one day. Then, I've had the opportunity to teach at Wake Tech, and that's been awesome as well. And I would say it's all step outside of your comfort zone. It's so rewarding when you can make a difference in someone's life, and they don't even have to tell you they, that you did. You know you did.

EURE: Thank you, and you can reach her at kkmiller@waketech.edu. All right, Contance.

BEST: Again, thank you guys for having us here today, and, for me, the most rewarding part of what I do is working alongside my students. It is no greater reward than to train these students within our programs and then to see them and actually get to work as a partner with them on the truck. And it's like raising a baby from the very beginning to watch them grow, and what they transform into is amazing. And to know that you helped impact not only their career but their life, that is the most rewarding part of what I do. And to know that, one day, I'm gonna need EMS and I'm gonna need public safety, and to know the quality that we are putting out into this field is what I'm very passionate about because, one day, I'm gonna need them. And I want them to be professional, I want them to be on their A-game, and I want them to look at me and say, "Oh my gosh, she trained me." So, that is what is rewarding for me.

EURE: All right, you can reach her at clbest@waketech.edu. That's Constance Best. Is she frozen? OK.

OVERTON: I just want to say thanks for having me. This is has been a lot of fun, and it's been a little out of my comfort zone. But I, I wanna say that the friendships and the relationships that you make in public safety are lifelong friendships and relationships. And, and we truly, it is truly is a public safety family. I love working with young students and then,

like Conner said, we, we get to see them on calls and, and ride a truck with them. And all the things that we've taught them, we actually get to see come to fruition. So, it's just been a lot of fun, and I truly enjoy working with the students and make, making friends, long, lifelong friends with them.

EURE: Thank you. We're gonna go to Dr. Wicker.

WICKER: Yeah.

EURE: Excuse me, you can reach Ms. Overton at tgoverton@waketech.edu. Excuse me, Dr. Wicker.

WICKER: Sure. So, Conner beat me to it, but I was gonna say, in public safety, we're not just training students who are going somewhere obscurely. We're training our backups. We're training our first responders. They're coming to our house. They're going to your house. And we never sleep on that burden. That's a responsibility that we step into gladly, and we take it very seriously. So, that is so much fun to get to work with people that you train.

But what I think is the best part of my job, I will tell you, is I'm so fortunate to be at Wake Tech. I have my dream job. The only thing I'm more passionate than public safety about is education, and I have this wonderful niche that is incredible. I love connecting people to resources. I love problem-solving. I love being out front of industry problems, trying to solve that on behalf of our students and our region.

But I, you know, I have to give a shout-out to our whole public safety team. I am just surprised and, and, and just excited every day that they let me hang around them. I, we have an incredible team, not just the ladies on this panel, but our entire team. Our support staff, our, our men, everybody on our team is a subject-matter expert and does incredible things behind the scenes every day and has extensive careers in law enforcement and public safety in general.

So, just know that we're here to help and support our students and our county and you guys, and it, it's just incredibly rewarding in public safety to know that you're not just saying, "The community needs ..." You are saying, "I'll do it." That's rewarding.

EURE: All right. Thank you. And that's Dr. Jamie Wicker, jfwicker@waketech.edu. We've completely run out of time, so y'all just have to wave goodbye. And this will be available on

YouTube for the audience so that you can review it. Thank you so very much, and we'll see you next time on the Micheal Eure Show.