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Media Release

Pulse of CCSD – Tammy Ravenell’s mission is to ensure no one goes hungry

Malcolm C. Hursey Montessori School

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North Charleston, SC – Tammy Ravenell was born in Ladson and is one of 12 children. When she was just 3-years-old, her father died, leaving her mother to pick up the pieces. Before long, there was no food in the house. Doing the only thing she knew to do, her mother prayed fervently.

“She said to Him, ‘Lord, you gave me these children, which are gifts. I need you to help me feed them,’” Ravenell said.

Ravenell, who is forthright in her description of her childhood, said she grew up in a neighborhood, down a long dirt road. The passing of her father created an even greater hardship for their family.

“One day, out of nowhere, a man pulled up with loads of groceries,” said Ravenell. “I was too young to know the back story, but we feasted on steak and potatoes and I remember him promising my mother that things would get better.”

They did and today Ravenell is a Food Services Manager with Charleston County School District (CCSD) at Malcolm C. Hursey Montessori School.

“My calling was food”

At just 15 years old, Ravenell got her first job. She said her motivation was to ensure that there would always be food in her home and on her family’s table.

“My calling has always been food,” said Ravenell. “Whether I was making money to buy it, whether I was serving it, or whether I was preparing it, I wanted to ensure that no one goes hungry.”

That first job was as a hostess at McDonald’s, back when many children hosted their birthday parties there.

“I loved the notion of serving those fun meals and making sure everyone had what they needed,” explained Ravenell. “It was my calling to be in the food services industry.”

Ravenell comes by that calling naturally. Her mother, Mildred Sloss, was the first “chef” at Baptist College (what is now Charleston Southern University). She fed thousands of students and faculty through the years, as well as community members, fellow parishioners at church, and anyone else who needed a meal.

“No matter how poor we were, she fed people her homemade specialties,” said Ravenell. “She had such a profound impact on me, and I consider her my ‘why.’ She knew what it was like to be hungry – literally.”

Ravenell has followed in her mother’s footsteps by carrying out the mission of serving others. She is a member of her church’s culinary team and an active volunteer at the food bank.

Ravenell has served and used her skills abroad in the city of Kampala which is the capital and largest city of Uganda, Africa. She also served meals to the students in Lugazi. Those eye-opening experiences only fueled her passion to ensure no child goes hungry.

A leader in food services

Ravenell’s colleague Cheryl Dilligard described her supervisor as a strong and powerful manager.

“Mrs. Ravenell is great to her staff,” said Dilligard. “She is willing to work with you so that you are great at your work. She listens to your opinions. She is always in the trenches with us. We are a team.”

A team indeed, according to Ravenell.

“My motto is that we do whatever it takes,” said Ravenell. “We check on each other, we lend a hand, and we ask how we can be of service to each other so that we can better serve our students and our staff.”

She learned that type of leadership after years in the food service industry as a manager of multiple quick-service restaurants. In 2000, she and her husband, Dr. Wayne Ravenell, opened their own restaurant called Genesis, with a catering arm of the business that served the military and the Charleston area.

“It’s in my blood,” said Ravenell.

Two years ago, Ravenell’s mother passed away. It was a difficult time in her life and her friend and former colleague suggested she might seek out a more relaxing career. That friend, Tina Fryar came on board with CCSD’s Nutrition Service Department as an operator at Burke High School and suggested she apply.

“She told me how much she enjoyed it and that it was my turn to enjoy life,” said Ravenell. “Walter Campbell (former Executive Director of Nutrition Services) and

Angela McLaughlin (current Executive Director) trusted me enough and I am so grateful. I love the kids.”

Like her colleagues in Nutrition Services, Ravenell knows that a hungry child can't learn. She goes the extra mile to make sure children get as much food as they desire, and many come in asking for seconds. She uses money donated by her church to pay for their second helping. Another way Ravenell gives back is to load money onto teacher accounts so they always have the ability to purchase meals. She does those things to nourish those around her with meals and love.

Ravenell takes great pride in the meals she and her team serve at Hursey.

“The food is good here,” said Ravenell. “We won't serve it if we wouldn't eat it. My team trusts me, and they follow my lead. I want things done right. We follow all CCSD recipes and protocols. I hold my team to a high standard and I try to lead by example. It is so important to follow the expectations of CCSD because, essentially, I am running a business. This cafeteria is a restaurant, and it has to be run as such.”

Dr. Timonthy Schavel, the principal at Hursey described Ravenell as an amazing member of the team.

“Her dedication to our students and staff is seen daily through her positive collaboration and interactions,” said Schavel. “The entire Hursey team is proud of Tammy and so fortunate to work alongside of her.”

Ravenell's commitment to the work has earned her leadership positions in the School Nutrition Association (SNA), both locally and nationally, where she and other industry leaders share knowledge and tips to continuously improve their offerings.

Ravenel is currently the Secretary of the local chapter of the SNA. In addition, she also serves as the national chair of the scholarship and awards committee.

“Tammy is a shining star in Nutrition Services,” said Angela McLaughlin Executive Director of Nutrition Services. “Her dedication to the students, faculty, and staff at Hursey is unparalleled. While Tammy has high expectations, she never asks more of her team than she is willing to give, they see that, trust her, and have formed a genuinely strong bond. What an amazing example of true leadership.”

Ravenell said the engagement with the students is a highlight of her work. She often gets to sit with them and catch up.

“They also let us know if they like or dislike something,” said Ravenell. “We know they're happy when they say ‘the food was bussin today.’”

At Hursey, differences are celebrated, even in the cafeteria. Ravenell and staff hosted a Taste Around Africa during Black History Month to teach students about West African cuisine, such as Jollof rice. It's moments like those that are rewarding.

"I wish I had known sooner how fulfilling this job would be," said Ravenell. "The journey to get here was worth it. This job gives me the quality of life I can't get anywhere else. I get to go home and have dinner with my husband and spend my weekends with my grandchildren."

Ravenell and her husband have five children and four grandchildren. Their lives are full of treasured moments, many of which involve a cherished meal around the dinner table.

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About the Charleston County School District

Charleston County School District (CCSD) is a nationally accredited school district committed to providing equitable and quality educational opportunities for all of its students. CCSD is the second-largest school system in South Carolina and represents a unique blend of urban, suburban, and rural schools spanning 1,300 square miles along the coast. CCSD serves approximately 50,000 students in 88 schools and specialized programs.

CCSD offers a diverse, expanding portfolio of options and specialized programs, delivered through neighborhood, magnet, IB (international baccalaureate), Montessori, and charter schools. Options include programs in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), music and other creative and performing arts, career and technical preparation programs, and military.