

**For Immediate Release**

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Advanced Studies

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## Media Release

### **Horticulture program comes full circle – now taught by former student**

**Mount Pleasant, SC** – Thirteen years ago, a brand new teacher set up shop in a classroom cottage, Trailer 11, on Wando High School's campus. Katie Donohoe was tasked with starting the school's first-ever horticulture class.

The course was designed as a feeder program for Trident Technical College and four-year colleges that offer horticulture or agriculture or for students interested in beginning their careers immediately upon graduation.

Through the years, the program grew in popularity. Some students took Donohoe's courses as an elective, others chose the program as a major.

"Sparking an interest in those students about horticulture and agriculture is what it was all about," said Donohoe.

Many of her students have enjoyed successful careers in the industry. One student's career path went in an unsuspecting direction. Paul Millar, who took Donohoe's class in 2015, is now teaching the course.

[The course has evolved](#) and is now included in the East Cooper Center for Advanced Studies (ECCAS) [Program of Studies](#) as a full pathway. Using Donohoe's same hand-crafted curriculum, 'Seed to Seed' (a seed is planted and rooted and then planted in a garden until it flowers and seeds again), Millar is teaching the next generation about sustainable resources, hydroponics, forestry, turf management, and more.

#### **The spark**

In 2015, Millar was just like every other high school student trying to meet their electives requirement. He chose horticulture class not having any idea it would be his future career.

"I thought to myself, 'how hard can it be,'" said Millar. "I fell in love with it and was inspired to install my own hydroponic tower garden at my house. Horticulture was my favorite class and I began to envision it being a career that I would truly love."

Millar was a completer of the program that eventually grew to such popularity that a second teacher was hired.

Millar graduated from Clemson University in just three years and earned his Master's Degree in Plant and Environmental Science. His next stop was at the Clemson Extension office in Charleston as a vegetable breeder.

"I loved it," said Millar. "I can't say enough good things."

As fate would have it, Millar was alerted to a Charleston County School District job posting and within a week of interviewing for the position for the new instructor for the ECCAS horticulture program, he was hired.

Millar is just 23 years old and now calls his former teachers colleagues. It seems a bit surreal, especially when he considers whose shoes he has to fill.

"I try to channel Mrs. Donohoe because she always had such great energy," said Millar. "She was very engaging so I try to bring that big energy to my class. I am somewhat reserved so I ramp it up to 100 so I can reach those kids like me."

Donohoe doesn't necessarily agree that Millar is reserved. She is confident he brought a certain energy to the classroom when he was a student. She recalls many energetic instances when Millar took center stage in class.

"He was such a fun student and I can only imagine his delivery to his students," said Donohoe. "I am confident he will be successful and get very many students hooked on this path where they too are bitten by the horticulture bug."

### **Career opportunities**

Outside of teaching horticulture, there are many career opportunities for students interested in the profession.

The major is comprised of four courses: Introduction to Horticulture, Landscape Technology, Nursery Greenhouse and Garden Center, and Turf Lawn Management.

"There are so many paths a person can go down with horticulture," said Millar. "Even if a student doesn't pursue it, you'll know how to keep a plant alive, grow your own food, and have a deeper appreciation for where your food comes from. You'll be more equipped for life."

Donohoe, an award-winning teacher, retired after seeing her vision for the horticulture wing at ECCAS come to fruition. She had done everything she set out to “grow” at Wando.

Donohoe went on to develop Growing Minds, which is a STEM-based learning program focused on educating and empowering youth to grow food anywhere and everywhere.

Donohoe works with schools across the district to utilize school gardens to their maximum potential. She also hosts groups of all ages (year-round) at her non-profit [Growing Minds Farm](#), which opened to the public in 2018. Growing Minds helped to preserve the rich agricultural history of a nearly five-acre farm in the historic Phillips Community. It was transformed from bare land into an educational demonstration farm showcasing sustainable agriculture techniques. Therefore, this educational farm not only teaches the principles of sustainable agriculture but it preserves a piece of history as well. She’s giving students something purposeful to be passionate about, she explained.

Just recently Millar took his students on a field trip there where they got to see the sustainable practices in use at the farm.

“There is something about growing your own food that is empowering,” said Donohoe. “We learned during the pandemic that farmers are important. It’s not just a hobby. Real-life demonstrations, like trips to the farm, are important for the kids to see.”

### **Full circle**

Millar is in the driver’s seat of the ECCAS horticulture program. Donohoe hires her former students to do work around her farm, and students in Millar’s class are starting their own businesses while still in high school. It’s more than either could have asked for.

“Seeing the kids leaning into it and loving the class is amazing to me,” said Millar. “I love it when they want to take on more and begin to take ownership of things they’ve planted.”

Donohoe agreed and explained that what these students are learning is something they can take with them regardless of their career choice.

“Knowing Paul is at the lead means that all the hard work that goes into starting a program from scratch was not for nothing,” said Donohoe. “It’s like leaving you’re your child unattended and hoping someone will come along and take care of it. It is such a relief to me that someone who learned from me is now teaching the next group. It makes my heart feel real good.”

All that remains of Trailer 11 are the two Crape Myrtles trees Donohoe's students planted, but the Seed to Seed program has flourished, growing into something bigger and better than Donohoe could have ever imagined.

Plant sales are hosted several times a year by the horticulture students and the proceeds directly benefit the program. To learn more, visit the school's [website](#). For more information, contact Principal Blankenship at (843) 856-5800.

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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 49,000 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.