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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Gala Celebration Honors Military Enlistees from Area Schools

**AIKEN, S.C.**, June 1, 2023 –The third annual enlistee recognition gala was recently held to honor area high school students who are graduating from academia to the military, choosing to serve and protect our country.

The event was hosted by Our Community Salutes (OCS) Midlands South Carolina Chapter, with the generous financial support of multiple sponsors. Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) was the “Circle of Honor” top sponsor.

“We’re here to recognize and honor the impressively brave commitment these young men and women have made for us and also to provide their parents or guardians with community support as their son or daughter transitions into military service,” said Jim Foley, Chairman for OCS, a nonprofit organization. “All the veterans who came together to help form the Our Community Salutes Midlands Chapter experienced the same anxieties and challenges each enlistee attending today’s event now are facing after making the decision to join the military. And each had the same courage, the same guts to raise their right hand, sign those documents and take the oath.”

In addition to an impressive list of guest speakers, including the first female from South Carolina to hold the rank of Lt. Gen. Maria Gervais, the enlistees each were escorted by a member of the U.S. Armed Services, provided an excellent meal and presented with a specially minted challenge coin commemorating the occasion.

The keynote speaker for the evening was Medal of Honor Recipient Sgt. Ryan Pitts (U.S. Army, Airborne).

Pitts distinguished himself by extraordinary acts of heroism at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty during combat in Afghanistan. He chose to attend the event to honor the enlistees, provide advice and create a scholarship fund for the Veteran and Military Success Program at the University of South Carolina Aiken.

He began his presentation by describing the attack he and his fellow soldiers endured the night of July 13, 2008, in the vicinity of a tiny village in a highly mountainous region of the country.

“Valor was everywhere that day,” said Pitts. “And the real heroes are the nine men who made the



*Midland Valley High School senior Christian Carrillo receives advice from Medal of Honor Recipient Sergeant Ryan Pitts, (U.S. Army, Airborne), at this year’s Our Community Salutes event honoring area students who have recently enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces.*

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ultimate sacrifice so the rest of us could return home. It is their names, not mine, that I want people to know.”

SRNS Senior Vice President Workforce Services and Talent Management Francine Burroughs, who attended the event, said she was impressed by the speakers and applauded the OCS Midlands South Carolina Chapter for the time and effort each member put in to ensuring a rewarding experience for the graduating students.

“I’m proud to have had the opportunity to witness and be a part of this ceremonial gala held for the benefit of each young adult who chose to step forward and say ‘Yes, I will go. I will defend this nation.’ We, as a company, support a wide range of educational and philanthropic needs throughout the region. We hope these young men and women carry with them, throughout their time in the military and beyond, the sage advice provided by tonight’s speakers,” said Burroughs.



*Jim Foley, Chairman for Our Community Salutes, Midlands South Carolina Chapter, introduces keynote speaker and Medal of Honor Recipient Sgt. Ryan Pitts.*

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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