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For Immediate Release

Anything, But Ordinary

VALDOSTA, Ga. (Nov. 17) She cracks open a Michelob Ultra as she dances around her kitchen cooking chicken in garlic and olive oil. Opening the Williams-Somona artichoke and lemon pasta sauce, the fragrance fills the air. Sounds like a typical evening for many American woman, but her day has been anything but ordinary. Debbie McLeod is a probation officer for the federal government in Valdosta, Ga.

The two-story grey house has a wrap-around porch with rocking chairs swaying in the breeze. McLeod's house has an upbeat feeling with walls painted sky blue and jade green. A shaggy, blond labradoodle dog barks loudly from the back yard.

A small flat screen TV plays "Friends" in the kitchen as the yellow plates are being piled high of the delicious pasta. McLeod's husband, Charles, is just getting home their farm in Hahira, Ga. He comes in, introduces himself as any gentleman would do, and excuses himself to go shower off the smell of dirt and sweat. Charles enjoys hunting after long days at TSG Industries. Dressed in a lime-green shirt with a Lilly Pulitzer skirt, McLeod tells how she got her start in criminal justice.

Starting out as an education major, following her mother's footsteps, she soon realized this was not the major for her. Not knowing what to do major in, it was her roommate and sorority sister that came up with the solution.

“She came home one afternoon and said, ‘Debbie, I found us a major and you only have to take one math and one science.’ After that I dropped my education classes and signed up for criminal justice, she laughs. “My parents thought I’d never be able to do anything with that.”

McLeod majored in criminal justice and got a masters degree in sociology from Valdosta State College (now Valdosta State University) in Valdosta, Ga.

Charles comes back into the kitchen smelling fresh and clean dressed in a navy polo and khaki shorts. He fixes a plate and joins the conversation. “I don’t know how she does what she does everyday; some of those people are very dangerous. I worry about her. You never know what they could be hiding,” Charles says as he changes the TV channel to the football game.

With her golden blonde bob, blue eyes, petite figure, and a warm personality it is hard to see her as a probation officer, yet getting to know her, she could not be anything else. McLeod is a chameleon, changing with the scene around her. At home, McLeod is all play, but at the office she is all work.

The climb up the corporate ladder has been a long one. It took many years to become a federal probation officer. After struggling to find work in the Valdosta area after college, Debbie began her career at the Welcome Center on I-75. After growing tired of this profession, McLeod started working with the department of family and children services. McLeod then got promoted to Georgia probation where she worked for 10 years.

Finally, McLeod interviewed for a federal probation job and has now been working there for 16 years. “In probation, you have to be flexible and willing to work with a lot of

different people. Plus, I work for the court and there are a lot of expectations,” McLeod speaks of her profession.

Entering McLeod’s soothing green office however, the atmosphere is so relaxed, you almost forget it is a federal probation office. Located on the second floor of the post office building in Valdosta, the office consists of four probation officers and one secretary.

A sense of flow and understanding of each other’s needs is present. While they are dependent on each other, each person understands that if one has their door shut, there is a deadline due soon and peace and quiet is needed.

Mary Davis is McLeod’s supervisor and close friend. They have worked together their entire careers.

“Debbie is a hard worker and close friend of mine, says David. “She is lots of fun to be around. It’s amazing to see her work as her attitude changes and she becomes the professional and not the light-hearted, fun woman I work with everyday.”

Working over 14 counties, they also spend a lot of time on the road. Leaving the post office in the government issued Ford Explorer, McLeod’s champagne Jaguar remains in the parking lot. She is driving to Quitman, Ga., 15 minutes from Valdosta, to check curfew of a pretrial client. The defender lives in a bread truck behind his parent’s small beat-up house.

On location, her care-free and fun demeanor diminishes. Her attitude changes, Debbie is serious about her job, she means business.

Checking to make sure the offender is home and not getting into any trouble, they talk of his ongoing medical conditions and if he has had any contact with law enforcement.

Next she takes a drug sample and checks his medications. Not knowing what could happen when at an offender's home, she is aware and cautious.

"I like to have a good time, but when I'm with one of my offenders I have to be serious, so they take me seriously. But at the same time that's the best part of this whole thing, everyone has a story and it's the people that make this job rewarding," Mrs. McLeod says (that is what her offenders call her).

McLeod says she does not like all the paper work. Each write-up of an offender has to be thought out and written concisely since it is submitted to the courts.

Driving back to the office, she admits that after all the stress and long hours of probation work when she retires she wants to travel though Europe for months at a time. "I am counting down the days, Greece here I come," Debbie jokes.