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## Life Lessons: CMPD Officer Rick Zoerb

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This spring, Rick Zoerb won CMPD's Lifesaving Award for saving a woman who'd overdosed.

COURTESY

**RICK ZOERB MOVED** to the Charlotte area in 2008 because of an opportunity to buy into a car dealership. The former owner of Lake Norman Infiniti and two other Charlotte dealerships enjoyed great financial success, but always thought something was missing. After a lot of soul searching, he joined the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department in 2014, completed training, and received his badge in early 2015. Serving in the Westover Division, he has arranged to help give beds and clothes to people who need them. He also saved the life of a woman who overdosed on heroin, and won the CMPD's "Lifesaving Award" this spring for helping to keep her alive until medics arrived. Here, Zoerb discusses his long and winding path to policing.

**AS A TEENAGER, I MADE SOME POOR CHOICES.** I dropped out of high school in Oregon, bounced around from place to place, and was homeless for a while. I understand needing help. Needing help doesn't make someone a bad person.

**I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO HELP THE UNDERDOGS.** I stuck up for kids in school. If someone didn't have a friend, I tried to be there for them. I look at being a cop as another way to help people.

**AT 18, I WAS WORKING AT A STEREO STORE IN OREGON.** There was a customer who was always bringing new cars in for CD systems. I noticed he was always dressed nicely and seemed to be doing well. So I asked him for a job selling cars.

**AT FIRST HE SAID NO.** He told me that I needed decent clothes and shoes. I needed to cut my hair. So I saved my money and went to Ross to buy a few new things. Then I went back to him. He saw my perseverance and gave me a chance to

sell.

**BY MY EARLY 30S, I OWNED SEVERAL CAR DEALERSHIPS.** I was doing very well financially. I was able to send my kids to private school, we took great vacations, had a vacation home. I wanted to give back, and I got to a point where I wanted to do more than give money.

**I FELT LIKE A HYPOCRITE WITH MY CHILDREN,** telling them they can be and do anything, but I wasn't doing it.

**DECIDING TO BECOME A POLICE OFFICER** was a thought process digested over years. The last couple of years before I did it, I thought, 'What if I don't like it? What if I can't handle it? What if my family is unhappy?' So I started volunteering and doing ride-alongs. Finally, I just

decided, this is what I should be doing.

**I ONLY HAVE A 10TH GRADE EDUCATION** and needed my GED to join the department, so here I was in this multimillion-dollar house and having a tutor come help me study for the test.

**I DOWNSIZED MY LIFESTYLE.** Sold my Ferrari. I sold my North Carolina dealerships. We sold the house and moved into a modest house. I was 39 when I went through the Academy. I started out at 205 pounds and was 155 when I finished.

**I GOT MY BADGE IN APRIL OF 2015.** So far, the police department has exceeded my expectations.

**A FEW DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS,** I went to a call for service. There was a family, and I starting talking to the parents. Money was tight and their car had just broken down. They were stressed because they didn't feel like they could provide the gifts their kids wanted. I got a list of what they wanted and got it for them. My family and I wrapped all the presents and I brought them over Christmas Eve. I still try to keep in touch with the family.

**I'D MUCH RATHER PROVIDE HELP,** talk to people, and build relationships, than arrest people.

—As told to Allison Futterman

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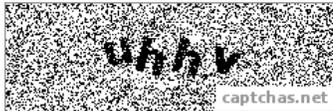
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