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From military to medical

By Carrie Bistline
ADVOCATE

Major General Gary Harrell, a nationally-recognized Army officer, was welcomed by the Knox County Hospital Tuesday, July 8.

Harrell served in the U.S. military over 30 years before retiring from active duty in March, 2008.

He is a former Delta Force commander who was immortalized in the book and movie, "Black Hawk Down." Harrell now lives in Johnson City and is the vice president of Business/Development at Pacer Health, the owner of Knox County Hospital.

Knox County Hospital went bankrupt in 2004, and was soon bought out by the county.

After a couple years of struggle, the hospital was then bought by Pacer Health, a company that has been the saving grace for the small-town hospital, said Rebecca Lewis, CEO of Knox County Hospital.

When asked how he went from commanding troops in a battle zone to overlooking the development of new businesses in the medical field, he didn't miss a beat. Harrell replied, "In both the military and the medical field, we have one really strong aspect in common; we take care of people."

Pacer Health has made a great deal of improvements possible for the new hospital. Harrell and Lewis agree that

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PHOTO BY CARRIE BISTLINE

At left, Major Gen. Gary Harrell signs copies of "Black Hawk Down," a book in which he was immortalized for his bravery while in the U.S. Army. The event was held at the Knox County Hospital Tuesday.

Harrell

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there are many things in common in the military and medical fields. "You recruit the best possible staff, give them the tools they need, and then leave them alone and trust that the job will be done right," said Lewis. This is where Pacer Health and the Major General come in. Pacer Health is responsible for making the necessary tools for the hospital staff available. Because of Pacer Health, the hospital has many new additions, such as new computer information systems, surgery equipment, carefully equipped physical therapy rooms, and endless tools and accessories.

The hospital focuses on more than just new additions, however. Inspired by its slogan from "Black Hawk Down," "Leave No Man Behind," Lewis has

developed a new campaign for her hospital staff. "The most frequent complaint you hear from patients in a hospital is that they are alone too long. They will say they call a nurse three or four times and won't hear from him or her for 30 minutes. We want to change that here," Lewis said. What is the solution? A campaign termed "Leave No Patient Alone." The hospital administration will instill in the staff the idea of truly caring about patients and never leaving them alone through staff meetings, flyers, and weekly letters.

"The hospital may not be able to cure the patient, but they can care for them," added Harrell. And that is what this is about for him. His entire career has been based on caring for people, protecting the public, and making decisions based on what is best for his men. Now, he is making decisions based on what is best for medical patients.

Mills, Corey pose with celebrated military hero



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