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Knox hospital celebrates 7 years

Ret. General Gary Harrell, inspiration for 'Black Hawk Down,' special guest at event

By SAMANTHA SWINDLER
MANAGING EDITOR

The retired Delta Force commander whose experience in Somalia inspired the film "Black Hawk Down" signed about 150 free books and movies at Knox County Hospital Tuesday for the hospital's seven year anniversary celebration.

The hospital held an open house with special guest, retired Major General Gary Harrell, who was a Lieutenant Colonel and Delta Force Squadron Commander during the Battle of Mogadishu described in "Black Hawk Down."

Harrell is portrayed by actor Zeijko Ivanek in the 2001 movie.

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PHOTO BY SAMANTHA SWINDLER

Retired general Gary Harrell, who was a Lieutenant Colonel and ground commander during the mission described in the film "Black Hawk Down," signs free copies of the book and movie which were given away during the hospital's seven year anniversary celebration Tuesday.

KNOX

FROM FRONT PAGE

In October 1993, Harrell was in Somalia with Task Force Ranger, sent on a mission to capture two key lieutenants of a Somali warlord named Aidid. After two of the task force's UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters were shot down, the soldiers found themselves in a firefight that lasted more than 15 hours, in which 18 American soldiers and about 500 locals were killed.

In 2002, Harrell was assigned control of Special Operations Command Central, and was the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, N.C. before retiring earlier this year, according to a press release from Pacer Health. He earned several campaign and service medals, including a Purple Heart and three Bronze Star medals, one with "V" device.

Harrell retired from the Army in March after spending 34-and-a-half years in the military.

Tuesday was the first time Harrell had held a signing regarding the mission that made his battalion famous, but he said it was something Knox County Hospital CEO Rebecca Lewis convinced him to do.

Since leaving the military, Harrell has taken a job as vice president of new business development for Pacer Corporation, which purchased Knox County Hospital about a year-and-a-half ago. Harrell, who works from his home in eastern Tennessee, was



PHOTO BY SAMANTHA SWINDLER

Kim Croley, pharmacy manager for Knox County Hospital, serves cake and cookies to visitors during the hospital's seven year anniversary celebration Tuesday.

contacted by Lewis about visiting for the hospital's anniversary celebration.

Harrell said his health care philosophy is simple — "it's all about the people, stupid."

In the military, no man is left behind, and in health care, he said, the goal is to leave no patient behind.

Since purchasing Knox County Hospital, Pacer Health has upgraded and replaced its clinical lab equipment, added a physical rehabilitation room, and converted to digital imaging radiology equipment. It also completely re-staffed the emergency

room, which Lewis said receives about 20,000 visits annually.

Local officials attended the open house, including Knox County Judge Executive J.M. Hall, Barbourville Mayor David Thompson, retired major general Donald Storm, and Senator Robert Stivers (R) and his Democrat opponent Michael "Whitey" Adkins.

The hospital also offered visitors free body mass index, blood glucose and blood pressure screenings — along with cake, cookies and drinks.