

Volunteer logs 3,500 hours

Erlanger helper Herb Cohn is July's Jefferson Award winner

By Michael Stone

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Every Thursday, as Herb Cohn sits at the information desk on the second floor of Erlanger hospital from 8 a.m. till 3 p.m., he'll greet you with a smile — and by name if he knows it.

He'll then politely tell you what you need to know.

In that brief encounter, you probably won't find out that he's a volunteer, let alone one who has racked up 3,500 hours at the hospital since 1997.

Cohn, 78, this month's Jefferson Award winner, is a dedicated nonpaid employee for Erlanger. But that's not the only reason he is receiving the award, which is given to those who have shown great devotion to community and public service.

Jefferson Award Honoree: Herb Cohn
WRCB TV Channel 3 contributed video

About the awards

The Jefferson Awards were restarted locally in May by the Chattanooga Times Free Press, WRCB-TV and First Tennessee Bank.

Monthly award nominations will be taken until March 2011, when a local committee will select five honorees whose stories will be submitted to award officials in Washington, D.C. One of the award winners will be chosen to represent Chattanooga in the nation's capital for the national Jefferson Awards banquet.

Cohn will join 71-year-old Hixson resident Bobby Radford, who was named June's recipient of the award, in contention for Chattanooga's D.C. representative.

Since 1972, the awards have been presented on the local and national levels. Each year, a national winner is selected in four categories: elected or public officials, private citizens, people benefiting the disadvantaged and individuals 35 years or younger.

HOW TO NOMINATE

Visit www.timesfreepress.com or www.WRCBTV.com to fill out an online nomination form.

Pick up a paper nomination form at any First Tennessee Bank location and deliver, mail or fax to:

Chattanooga Times Free Press

P.O. Box 1447

Chattanooga, TN 37401

Fax: 423-668-5001

Cohn is a Navy veteran, and he operated his Chattanooga-based family business, the Violet Camera Shop, started by his grandfather in 1915, for more than 40 years before retiring. He also serves on and is a former chairman of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library Board, he is a Master Gardener and, of course, he loves helping whomever he can at Erlanger.

"I will say, and I've said it before, it is a privilege to volunteer at Erlanger hospital," Cohn said. "It's a pleasure to be able to assist people often who are very apprehensive to begin with when they come to the hospital."

Cohn, a lifelong Chattanooga resident minus four years for college and three for the Navy, is a McCallie School alumnus who returned to the city for good in 1956.

"This community — Chattanooga and Hamilton County — provided a good living for my family and a number of other families who were working for me and with me, and this is payback time."

Susan Sawyer, publications editor for the Erlanger Health System, nominated Cohn for the award. She described him as someone who "personifies the perfect volunteer."

"People like Herb are so dedicated," she said. "It makes Erlanger a wonderful place to be with the help of these volunteers because we couldn't operate without them."

And Cohn has kept coming back to the hospital to help it operate, at least partially because he sees it as more play than work.

"I have just as much enjoyment in my retirement years as I did my years in the work force," he said. "(Erlanger) is a great place to be."