



CONTACT:

Mark Kruea
Office: (843) 918-1014
Mobile: (843) 450-1695
info@cityofmyrtlebeach.com

Media Advisory

To: Myrtle Beach Media

From: Mark Kruea, Public Information Officer

Date: Wednesday, January 2, 2019

Re: Military Appreciation Days Parade Grand Marshal

Singer, soldier Keni Thomas is Grand Marshal For 2019 Military Appreciation Days Parade

Keni Thomas, decorated U.S. Army veteran-turned-country musician, will serve as Grand Marshal of the 2019 Military Appreciation Days Parade at The Market Common on Memorial Day weekend. The parade begins at 10:30 a.m., Saturday, May 25, and is a highlight of the weekend. The month-long celebration is a “thank you” to our dedicated service men and women, both past and present.

In 1993, Staff Sergeant Thomas deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia, with Third Ranger Battalion as part of an elite special operation called Task Force Ranger. Its mission was to find and capture criminal warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid. On October 3, 1993, Thomas and fellow rangers distinguished themselves in an 18-hour firefight that would later be recounted in the book and movie, *Black Hawk Down*. Nineteen Americans died and 78 were wounded in the worst urban combat seen by U.S. troops since World War II.

After Mogadishu, SSGT Thomas volunteered for one more enlistment. He became an assistant team leader for a six-man ranger reconnaissance team, earning his master parachutist rating with more than 400 military freefall jumps. He completed the Special Forces Combat Diver course, became an Advanced EMT and was one of 10 Americans to complete the Belgian Commando Course.

In 1997, Thomas traded in his war boots for a microphone, ending his military career to pursue a music career. Thomas now works full-time as an award-winning country music recording artist and songwriter in Nashville. He and his band, Cornbread, were featured in the movie *Sweet Home Alabama*, and his music can be heard on country stations nationwide.

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A powerful speaker, Thomas tells the incredible story of extraordinary individuals and how they fought to bring each other home. Using his experiences on the battlefield, Thomas inspires people to achieve greatness by stressing the importance of outstanding leadership at every level, even if the only person you are leading is yourself. His message of “Train as you fight – Fight as you train and lead by example” epitomizes the Ranger motto, “Rangers Lead the Way!”

Thomas is a graduate of the University of Florida and the recipient of the Bronze Star for Valor. He is a regular guest on major news networks as a military analyst. He also has been recognized by the president and Congress and has received the American Patriot Award.

Thomas is most proud of his appointment as a national spokesman for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. They provide college educations to children of our special operations personnel killed in combat or training.

Military Appreciation Days are sponsored by the City of Myrtle Beach, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce and PGBA, LLC. Each year, the Military Appreciation Committee looks for a celebrity with a military background to serve as grand marshal for the annual parade. Previous grand marshals have included John McCain, Buzz Aldrin, Rocky Bleier, J. R. Martinez, Montel Williams, Noah Galloway, Alex Skarlatos and DeShauna Barber.

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See attached photo of Keni Thomas.