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Middletown native, Olympic gold medalist visits Fairfield

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By Eric Robinette

FAIRFIELD — Olympic gold medalist and Middletown native Kayla Harrison made an appearance Thursday in Butler County.

Harrison greeted more than 1,000 employees at Liberty Mutual's Fairfield office to promote the company's sponsorship of the 2014 winter Olympics in Russia.

"She's a very bright and charming spirit and is a lot of fun," said Mike Winner, president of Liberty Mutual's mid-Atlantic region. "Being a local girl from Middletown makes it more exciting."

Harrison, who won the United States' first gold medal in judo at the London summer Olympics last year, is on a whirlwind tour. She will travel to France today to begin training for the 2016 summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Traveling to exotic locales has been one of the many perks of her Olympic victory. Another is being able to return home more often.

"I've been home at least four times since the Olympics," Harrison said. "I was there four times in the six years before that."

Harrison said she is also enjoying making public appearances.

"One year out from London, I was a nervous wreck, so it's fun to do this and not worry about competing," she said.

At least one employee playfully decided to compare his arm to the gold medalist's. Jamal Henry, of Cincinnati, and Harrison rolled up their sleeves and flexed their biceps as employees snapped pictures.

"This is the closest I'll get to somebody who's like a boxer, so I thought I'd do the pose, but I know she'd kick my butt," Henry said.

But Harrison is not just signing autographs and posing for pictures. She's also writing her memoirs, tentatively titled "Golden."

"My goal is to show people warning signs of sexual abuse," she said.

Harrison endured the abuse from her former coach, Daniel Doyle, who was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

While Harrison's forte is the summer Olympics, she has favorites in the winter sports, too.

"I like figure skating. It's the exact opposite of what I do," she said. "My job is to beat people up, and their job is to look graceful, and they do it on ice. I'd probably break my ankle if I tried to do what they do."

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