

# Two many chiefs at Boulder Creek fire department

By JOHN BESSA  
Sentinel staff writer

**BOULDER CREEK** — Confusion about who will preside over the future of the Boulder Creek volunteer fire department will leave the agency with two paid administrators this fall.

Chief Bud Tomlin, 61, announced in April that he would retire in October. But he changed his mind and told the department's board of directors in January he would stay in the job he's held for 23 years for about two more.

By the time Tomlin told the fire board he was staying, it had already interviewed and selected a new chief — longtime volunteer Sam Robustelli.

"It took us by surprise when he announced he was going to retire," said Jay Baker, president of the three-person board.

"Then it really took us by surprise when he said he wasn't going to retire," he said.

So the department, which has one paid employee — the chief, will have two, come Oct. 1, Tomlin said.

The assistant chief will be paid about \$3,000 a month, he said.

"I don't know how that's going to hit the community when they find out they've doubled the administration costs here," Tomlin said. The department has a budget of about \$300,000.

Tomlin handles all administrative duties in the department now, but will put the assistant chief in charge of operations this fall.

Baker said the board began its search for a new chief after Tomlin announced he was leaving, but before receiving a written notice from the chief.

Tomlin never provided a written notice, Baker said.

"We've been trying since April of last year to get a statement from Bud," Baker said.

Tomlin said the board chose a replacement too soon.

"They were probably a bit premature on that," he said.

As for his retirement decision, he said, "Financially, it's not really feasible for me to go ahead and retire right now."

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Tomlin worked for the U.S. Postal Service for 20 years. He retired in 1991, but isn't old enough yet to collect his retirement benefits.

The fire department doesn't have a pension plan, he said.

Robustelli is in the middle of the confusion.

When the board asked him if he wanted to become the next head of the Boulder Creek fire department, Robustelli decided to leave his job as a district attorney's inspector and take the offer.

"I was asked if I wanted the position and made arrangements on my end here," said Robustelli, who joined the fire department as a volunteer in 1965.

The money is available for both, said George Cress, fire board member.

"We really can use it," he said of the assistant chief position.

"We didn't just put him in there to please the boys," he said.

The district is one of the largest volunteer departments in the state. It also has an extra station on Highway 236, Cress said. The assistant chief will have plenty of things to do, he said.

"It makes us kind of thin sometimes if we get a big call," he said.

After Tomlin retires, the district might return to having one chief, Cress said.

"We'll see how this works," he said.