

# City fire chief moving on

## *Gary Smith in line to take Aptos position*

By BRIDGET MENDOZA

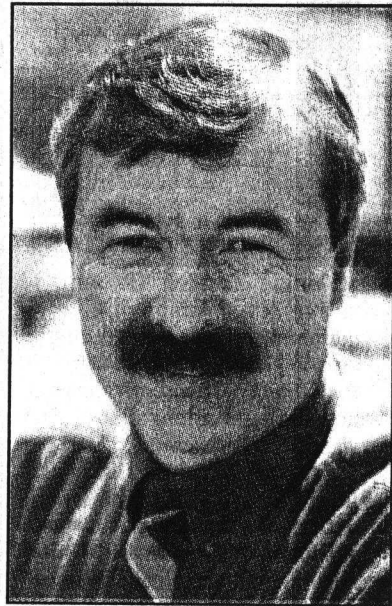
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Watsonville Fire Chief Gary Smith confirmed today he will be leaving his post to pursue the helm of the Aptos/La Selva Fire District.

Smith, a native of Fort Bragg who came to Watsonville as chief in 1984, will also be leaving his duties as assistant city manager, a post he assumed as an interim post in 1991.

If the Aptos/La Selva Fire District gives final approval to his contract, Smith will replace former Chief Philip Scofield, whose retirement party is tonight at the Seascap Resort.

"They're happy for me but at the same time we're all kind of sad," said Smith of announcing his move to Watsonville fire crews. Smith said he and the department had weathered three official disaster declarations



Gary Smith

together, along with numerous fires and other calamities.

"We're the best rated fire department in the area on the lowest budget," said Smith of Watsonville. "It hurts me deeply to leave."

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## SMITH

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At the same time, Smith is looking forward to working with the Aptos/La Selva Fire District, whose board of directors will review the contract Smith has already signed at a meeting this afternoon.

Watsonville City Councilman Al Alcalá was surprised Friday morning to hear of Smith's move. "We're going to miss him — he's a dynamo," said Alcalá. "I'm sure it must be a great package for him to leave a city he loves."

Smith says his contract is for approximately \$99,000 annually — about the same as he has made in Watsonville.

The city will now face the challenge of filling two positions — assistant city manager and fire chief.

"That's going to be up to (city manager) Carlos Palacios," said Smith of the assistant city manag-

er position. He was positive, though, about the state he was leaving the city in. "Things are going well, we've weathered storms and have good, solid players in place," he said, citing leaders in the departments of housing, community development, parks and recreation, police, and fire.

Smith said there are "no leads yet" on who will assume the fire chief post, but hinted at the capability of Assistant Fire Chief Ben Evans. "The department certainly has some strength inside its management structure," he said.

Smith, who earned a bachelor's degree in fire administration from Cogswell Polytech College, began his career in 1971 in Davis and was a fire marshal and assistant chief in Manteca. During his time in Watsonville, he was an active participant in community activities and instrumental in formulating a program to guard against releases of anhydrous ammonia from local cold storage plants.

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