

Fire chief works retirement deal

By LANE WALLACE
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Al Forbes, who will retire as chief of the Aptos-La Selva Fire Protection District in June, has negotiated a deal that will entitle him to an extra \$999 a month in retirement pay.

Last summer, Forbes asked the board to pay his final year's sick leave and vacation as part of his regular paychecks so he will be entitled to a higher retirement.

At their regular meeting last July 14, board members voted unanimously for the arrangement, although one member now says he wasn't aware of what Forbes was getting.

Forbes is making \$4,734 a month in base pay. When the sick leave and vacation time are figured in, his pay is \$6,161.

Forbes, 53, has 31 years in the fire service and is eligible for

retirement at 70 percent of his pay from the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). Had Forbes not made his deal, he'd be entitled to a retirement check of \$3,313 a month for life. Under the agreement he made, he's entitled to \$4,312.

The deal Forbes negotiated is proper and "somewhat common in relation to management," said Bob Walton, chief of the accounting division of PERS in Sacramento.

Walton noted that only money due Forbes in his final year can be used to boost his retirement pay. Forbes said he is due some unused vacation and sick leave

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from past years, but that will be paid in a lump sum when he retires and not be a factor in his retirement checks.

Forbes' retirement pay "will cost them (the fire district) something right away" in the form of higher contributions into PERS, Walton said.

The cost of Forbes' retirement will be spread out among the agencies he worked for — fire departments in Chico, Carmel, Monterey and the Aptos-La Selva district, where he's been since 1981.

Just how much Forbes' retirement will cost the agencies he worked for can't be determined. It depends on a variety of factors, including how long Forbes lives, the rate of inflation, and how much PERS makes on its investments.

Part of Forbes' retirement checks will come from the money he has paid into the system over the years. With interest, it's now about \$150,000, Forbes said. About a quarter to a third of Forbes' payments will come from his own contribution, Walton estimated. The \$150,000 will continue to earn interest for Forbes' account.

Forbes said he will exercise an option from PERS to take only 88 percent of what he's entitled to. By taking the lower amount, Forbes' wife will be entitled to his benefits if he dies after his contribution is exhausted.

Commissioner Roy Johnston, contacted yesterday morning, said he was unaware of the deal with Forbes until last week and "would have gone through the ceiling" had he known of it.

At last night's fire board meeting, Johnston said, "I had a call from the chief indicating I had talked to somebody in the paper" about Forbes' retire-

ment plan. "I never knew anything about it." (Forbes was first contacted by this reporter early last week.)

Johnston asked for a closed personnel session on the matter at the board's March 8 meeting, and one was scheduled.

Other board members said they were aware of what Forbes was granted.

The vote for the deal with Forbes was unanimous and included Johnston, Commissioner Stewart Davis said in a phone interview yesterday morning. "He (Forbes) explained every bit of it."

Davis said Forbes, who has been chief since 1983, has worked hard for the district and "deserves what he gets.

"Yes, we are going to pay a few more dollars," Davis acknowledged, adding that Forbes has been "very open and honest."

Another consideration, Davis said, was the board's desire to have Forbes on the job until the end of the fiscal year in June, rather than have him take his vacation and sick leave and stop working several months earlier.

The board has hired a consulting firm to look for Forbes' replacement; the new chief hasn't been hired yet.

Burly Burlison, chairman of the fire board, said he was also well aware of what Forbes was asking for.

Commissioner Dick Duchscher, interviewed at the fire station after last night's meeting, said he understood the additional cost to the fire district would not be substantial.