

Winter Park firefighter regains job

Board orders 120-day suspension as penalty for insubordination charge

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Judy Manor, who was fired from her job as a firefighter Aug. 11 for insubordination, will return to work in mid-December. A city appeal's board said the firing was too harsh.

After 14 hours of testimony Wednesday, the city's Civil Service Board voted unanimously to suspend Manor for 120 days instead of firing her. However, she will not be paid or receive other benefits for that period.

"About six hours ago I began wondering if the punishment [firing] fit the crime. I still wonder that," said board member Steven Bechtel, who was chairman of the meeting.

Manor, 36, was suspended in July and later fired after she was charged with insubordination at the scene of a fire. She appealed to the board to get her job back. Manor is one of two women in the 44-person fire department.

The incident occurred the night of July 2 when firefighters responded twice to a fire at 656 Worthington Drive. In his account of that night, fire Lt. Bobby Ferrell said the second time they went to the house Manor dawdled outside for about 15 minutes.

Manor said the maximum time that elapsed between their arrival at the house and when Ferrell confronted her was five minutes. Ferrell said he ordered Manor to leave the scene and go home but she disobeyed him and instead went into the house. Manor said she did not take his order seriously because she did not believe she had done anything wrong.

In his move to have the board uphold Manor's dismissal, city labor attorney C. Robin Fawcett said Manor committed a series of violations of department and city policies. The city claimed Manor called Ferrell and Battalion Chief Wayne Garner derogatory names, complained about and neglected her duties, was argumentative and disobeyed orders.

Attorney James Moreland, who represented Manor, ridiculed the city's picture of Manor.

"You are asking us to believe that someone who for six years has a steadily improving rate of performance suddenly becomes a one-person crime rate," said Moreland.

The board agreed that Manor should have obeyed the order to leave the scene and argued about it later. But several board members said the city did not prove that Manor had not performed her duties.

Board members Larry Mosley and John Lord argued there should be some type of punishment to send a message to police and firefighters that orders must be obeyed.

"I wasn't fired. I'm really happy about that," Manor said, adding she plans to come back to work by Dec. 15.

The 120-day suspension could cost Manor more than \$10,000 — \$5,000 in lost wages and at least \$5,000 in attorney's fees.

Although Manor is a member of the fire department's union, it belatedly objected to her firing and has not offered to pay her attorney's fees, she said.

Assistant city manager John Litton, who made the final decision to fire Manor, said he does not know if the city will appeal the board's decision to the city commission.

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