

State clears fire department of sex bias

By Yvonne C.T. Vassel

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — The state Commission on Human Relations has cleared the Winter Park Fire Department of a sex discrimination complaint filed against it last January by its only female firefighter.

Firefighter Judy Manor said Friday there have been tremendous changes in the department's operation since she filed her complaint and she wishes the issue put behind her.

"Sometimes when you are put under pressure in this business, with no idea why, it makes you very frustrated," said Manor. "I think the end result has been good but the overall experience wasn't. I'm glad that it's over and I think everyone benefited."

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— Firefighter Judy Manor

Manor joined the department in November 1981. Her treatment there changed when she went from one shift to another in February 1984, her complaint said. In October 1984 she was denied the right to drive the department's tower truck and, before January of this year, had not been allowed to drive any of the department's trucks for seven months.

Manor said she believed she had been discriminated against because,

before changing shifts, she had been allowed to drive the trucks and perform other duties that she could not do on the new shift.

Also, on her previous shift she had received satisfactory evaluations but that changed on the new shift. "I believe that the quality of work has remained the same or better," her complaint said.

Manor said Friday she believes the department's lack of a comprehensive

training program was the root of many problems and some male firefighters also were banned from driving trucks until they could pass certain tests.

"When I was on 'A' shift we were taught to do things the way that shift did it. There was no formal training to drive, we just learned as we went along. When I went to 'B' shift the officers didn't feel I was trained enough the way they wanted, but I couldn't see why because things had been okay before," Manor said.

Because she was not specifically told why her work was not up to par, she believed the actions taken against her were because of personal prejudice, Manor said. In her complaint she charged verbal harassment by some officers but those claims were not sub-

Please see BIAS, 10

10 The Orlando Sentinel, Sunday, October 6, 1985 WP

BIAS

From 1

stantiated to the satisfaction of the state commission.

Manor said she has changed shifts since her complaint was filed and enjoys working with the people on the current shift. Whatever problems she had with the officers have been worked out, she said.

"Things have changed drastically. I got a shift change, I completed all of the testing, I'm driving now and my attitude has changed. I am just much more confident in my abilities," Manor said.

The uniform driver-training and testing program, started by Fire Chief Mike Molthop, has made the difference, she said.

"The training officer trains and tests everyone exactly the same and we do it in front of each other so we each know exactly what the other person can and cannot do," Manor said. "That's real good because it builds confidence in yourself and in the people you work with."

Personnel director and assistant city manager John Litton said Manor's

complaint pointed out the need for a documented, comprehensive training program in the fire department.

The city's 1986 budget — which took effect Oct. 1 — provides money for a full-time fire training officer. That person will be named soon, Molthop said.

Manor was once one of four women firefighters but she is the only one now. She said there is no special pressure in being the only one.

Manor bypassed the department's chain of command and the city's Civil Service Board when she filed her complaint directly to the commission.

"I was having problems with the captains and the lieutenants and I didn't feel I could go through the chain of command and be treated fairly," Manor said. "Perhaps I was being oversensitive because of the pressure I felt myself under."

Last week she spent about three hours talking to Molthop, after the commission's decision became final, and she said she believes she can talk to him about future problems. She will not pursue the complaint and said she is glad it is over.

"I enjoy the work, I have time with my family that I wouldn't have if I worked 9 to 5. I now enjoy coming to work," Manor said.