

# Winter Park, firefighters to sign supervisors pact

By Sara Isaac

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Amid a legal battle over whether battalion chiefs can belong to the firefighters' union, the union and city have agreed to a contract for fire department supervisors.

The one-year contract, which city and union officials expect to sign at a city commission meeting Tuesday, covers fire department lieutenants, fire inspectors and the fire marshal.

Until a court decision is made, the disputed battalion chief's position also is covered by the contract.

"We feel like it's a good contract," said Bob Ferrell, president of the Winter Park firefighters union.

Under the agreement, supervisors will not get a pay increase beyond the 2 percent cost-of-living raise proposed for all city employees next year.

But supervisors will get a package including a savings plan that defers taxes, up to \$120 a year for a physical examination, and a performance-based pay raise of up to 2.5 percent.

The contract includes rewards for supervisors who increase skills. Employees can boost their annual salary by up to \$1,950 by becoming certified in one or more of eight technical areas.

For example, supervisors certified as emergency medical technicians receive an annual \$390 boost to wages. Certification in handling hazardous

material means a \$390 boost as does certification in highrise rescue efforts.

"We've encouraged them to go out and get certifications that aren't required for present job classification but make them better employees," said assistant city manager John Litton, one of the city's negotiators.

Ferrell and Litton said talks went more smoothly and quickly than the first contract negotiations with firefighters and paramedics, who signed an agreement with the city in April.

Talks were less fractious because much ground had been covered during negotiations for the first contract.

But while moving toward agreement, the city and the union have disagreed over whether battalion chiefs can participate in the union. The Public Employees Relations Commission had said battalion chiefs could participate, but the 5th District Court of Appeal overturned that ruling last month.

Last week, the appellate court dealt the union a second blow by denying its plea for a rehearing. The court also refused to certify the union's request for a hearing by the state Supreme Court.

The union wants the Supreme Court to decide because different appellate courts have handed down conflicting decisions about battalion chiefs' participation. Certification by an appellate court makes it easier to obtain a Supreme Court hearing. PERC has until mid-October to decide whether it will appeal directly to the Supreme Court.