

City of Winter Park
Fire Department

Winter Park firefighters say no to union

Informal group prefers to work
with city in ironing out problems

By Deborah Burstion-Wade

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — A majority of the city's firefighters have voted against dissolving their organization to become a part of the union that represents Orange County firefighters.

The vote was 17 to 12 in favor of retaining their own association, and not joining the Central Florida Professional Firefighters Association, said Lt. Chip Gaines, president of the Winter Park group.

A merger with the Orange County group would have provided Winter Park firefighters with bargaining rights with city officials, something they don't have, and it would have provided increased resources and personnel to the members.

Although the association, Winter Park Firefighters Local 1598, was organized as a union in 1966, firefighters voted to dissolve the union in the mid-1970s. They continued to meet as an informal organization.

Gaines said the group prefers ironing out any complaints or problems with city officials, and said there are no plans to turn the group into a union.

Formal grievances and appeals for the police and fire department are handled by the city's civil service board, which meets the first Tuesday of each month at the police department.

Please see UNION, 12

O. Sentinel
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UNION

From 1

"We want to give the city a fair chance to take care of problems. I think there will be a good working relationship," Gaines said.

He said he has already begun having monthly discussions with Assistant

City Manager John Litton, who also serves as personnel director for the city.

The seven-member civil service board is responsible for setting promotion procedures and dealing with grievances and complaints among police and fire personnel. Five members are appointed by the city commission and the fire and police departments each elect a representative.

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