

Women firefighter files discrimination claim

By VICTOR ASSERSOHN

A woman firefighter has asked for a probe into Winter Park Fire Department for alleged sexual discrimination.

The move--amid revelations of a secret "black book" kept on firefighters--comes a day after the department's first and longest serving woman firefighter quit her job.

A formal complaint alleging sexual discrimination by the fire department was made Tuesday to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Orlando by firefighter Judy Manor, who has been with the department for nearly three years.

The woman firefighter who quit her job Monday after difficulties in getting time off to continue her studies, was five-year veteran Dara Molen, who had worked her way up to a fully qualified paramedic position.

Manor, who lives with her husband Tom and their three children in Winter Park, says that her troubles started after she was transferred from the A-shift to the B-shift on Feb. 28 this year.

"When I was working with A-shift I had a good working relationship with the officers, but I am now constantly under watch. I know the officers are watching me and they write down things. I just want to be accepted, but they are not accepting me because I am a woman. They have a history of this on this shift," said Manor.

"I am being treated differently. I am not allowed to do this or that. They have no trust, confidence or faith in me," said Manor.

Manor says that she found entries in a secret "black book" kept by the shift captain. The entries said..."Judy didn't take the trash out to night"... "Judy didn't show cooperation"...and "Judy didn't show enthusiasm on the gas leak"...

She denies these statements in the "black book" and said: "There is nothing good in the book. All of it is bad."

Manor says that she has not been allowed to drive the tower truck and during her evaluation three months ago the results were "horrendous" after she had been told she had a poor attitude.

"If I was as bad an employee as they said I was they would have fired me by now," she said.

Manor says that she has been discriminated against over the driving of vehicles and it would be pointed out if she backed one of the trucks slightly over a road marking, while if the same thing was done by a male fireman no comment would be made by the ranking officers.

Manor agreed that she failed a driving test last Thursday and was not allowed to drive the tower truck but added that two male firefighters also failed the test but they were allowed to drive the truck.

She asked the shift lieutenant on Sunday following the driving test, if she could drive the tower truck while drivers were being assigned for the whole shift.

Manor, who says most of her driving is done in the squad truck and driving the tower crane is a

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Fire department

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necessary part of improving her skills, said her request was turned down. When she asked why she was told that if she didn't like it "she could leave and there was the door," she said.

"The captain and lieutenant on the shift also said that if I questioned them again they would send me home. They said, 'We are in charge. We make the decision and you have no right to question our decision.'"

"I was told that I had four alternatives. Either I could quit, I could put in for a shift change, I could go to Chief Mike Molthop or I could go to an attorney," said Manor.

"I know my alternatives. I have been to the chief and I have put in for a shift change but nothing has happened," said Manor, who added emphatically, "I have no intention of quitting."

She said that she had told the two shift chiefs, "I am not going to quit and I don't want a shift change. I want to resolve this. I have every intention of doing something."

And what she did decide to do was to make a complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, in an effort to resolve the difficulties she has encountered since changing shifts.

Her husband said, "My wife was happy for two years. She enjoyed what she was doing. Now she is fed up."

"Judy has no reason to yell discrimination and at the time we felt that it would all pass but if you are being discriminated against because you are a woman I think you would yell discrimination. I know I wouldn't be three years on a job and then be put through harassment like a rookie. I think it is largely a problem of leadership."

"This is more than I can handle. I don't deserve it. I am not asking for the moon--only equal treatment..." said Judy Manor, who said that unless the problem is resolved she will consider bringing a lawsuit against the city.

A veteran Winter Park firefighter who spoke only on the strict condition that he was not identified, said, "Some of the firefighters are aware of the existence of the black book."

"I think this practice of keeping a black book on people should be abolished immediately."

"I think the problem is there is a group of individuals who alienate people and don't give them a chance. I think you will find more and more people leaving and you will have a bunch of untrained people doing the work and this could

result in a malpractice suit being brought against the city. Firefighters know that Emergency Medical Service is what's coming in the future and they want to learn it.

"I think that the leadership shouldn't be so autocratic."

Paramedic Dara Molen, who has taken a job with Royal Metro Ambulance Service which took over county service from Herndon Ambulance, said morale was low at the fire department.

"I know of at least five more firefighters, of which two are paramedics, who are giving serious consideration to leaving," said Molen who spent about one year on B-shift.

"In my opinion I would have to say that I have noticed that B-shift has the attitude that a woman can't do the job as well as a man. This in itself is a form of sexual discrimination," said Molen.

She said that the black book should be outlawed as it contained only bad comments about firefighters.

"I don't think the comments are used in yearly evaluations but I think they are used against employees in other ways like, for instance, if they want to get rid of them," said Molen.

"There are cliques and if you don't fit into it you are alienated. It messed up my morale and there is a low morale at the fire station. These problems have cropped up before but they have never been corrected," added Molen.

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Asked to comment Tuesday afternoon on the sex discrimination complaint, Fire Chief Mike Molthop said, "I am totally unaware of any situation with Judy Manor. I haven't been made aware of any problems she had."

Molthop denied that morale was low at the fire station and added, "I know of some notes but not a black book. I am sure all the shift commanders keep notes on the staff."

After it was pointed out that some firefighters felt it unfair that "secret" notes should be kept on them and the notations were derogatory, Molthop said, "I can assure you that I will issue instructions, as I have issued instructions in the past, that if an officer wants to make a notation on an employee's performance then he should at the same time counsel the employee."

"There are some problems. One of the biggest complaints is about training," said Molthop who pointed out that he had only been appointed chief

in May and he was working on setting up a training schedule and sorting out the problems.

One of the biggest training problems was driving and he said he planned to ask Police Chief Ray Beary for the use of an officer to carry out independent driving tests.

Confirming Tuesday afternoon that she had filed a complaint for alleged sexual discrimination Judy Manor said that the grounds for the complaint were that on Sunday she had been refused permission to drive the department's tower truck because she had failed the test, but so had two male firefighters who she claims were allowed to drive the truck.

The complaint will be forwarded to the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission in Miami under whose jurisdiction the Winter Park area falls and it is expected that the result will be known in 90 days.