

Firefighters union quietly goes to grave

By MARY R. HEFFRON

At a little more than a year old, the Winter Park firefighters union died in October and was quietly buried last week.

The end of the union, certified by the state Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC) in September 1976, was marked two months ago when union President Michael Molthop called a press conference to announce members had voted to ask PERC to decertify their union as the firefighters' official bargaining agent with the city.

The burial came last week when the

firefighters, members of Local 1598 of the International Association of Firefighters, voted 32-1 to scrap the union in a PERC election in Winter Park. Thirty-seven firefighters were eligible to vote.

Molthop said the group hoped to get a better deal from the city than they had through a two-year contract negotiated earlier this year. He added the union would still exist even though the city would not have to bargain with it.

"We want to stay closely knit for the purpose of taking our requests as a body to the chief and to the city manager," Molthop said. "I think this will be the

proper way to go to get better results."

The contract was agreed on between union and city representatives after seven months of intermittend negotiations. It had not been approved by the city or the firefighters and contained neither the shorter working hours nor the overtime pay the union had pushed for.

Both sides stressed the firefighters were not promised a pay increase after the union was decertified. But Asst. City Manager Rick T. Fitzgerald, who represented the city in negotiations, noted the city commission recently adopted a police pay plan that allows

officers to reach their top pay scales within seven years rather than the previous 26 years.

He said a similar plan for firefighters would be "consistent." Winter Park police voted against unionization in August.

Fitzgerald said the city was "very happy with the way the election went. We're looking forward to working with the fire people on a one-tone basis rather than through a third party."

"It certainly improves the safety situation in Winter Park to have all the public safety employees nonunionized," he added.