

City union head objects to outside hirings

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

A few weeks ago the city hired two new firefighters. That does not sit well with some longtime public employees.

Raymond Wingfield is the president of the Orange Municipal Employees Benevolent Association, the union that represents 101 city employees in every department except police and fire. The union recently had 12 of its members rehired by the city after layoffs.

Robert Glassman and Daniel Hessler recently were taken on as the first two of 12 new firefighters city officials are supposed to hire through a \$1.2 million federal grant. City officials the 24 hirings will address the personnel issues about which fire union

officials had complained for years.

During the swearing-in ceremony for Glassman and Hessler, Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. said all the hirings will increase the Fire Department's staff from 50 to 74 employees. Fire union officials said the department has been budgeted for as many as 80 members in the past.

Wingfield said he is glad for Glassman and Hessler, but that does not mean that he is happy about the unemployment situation with his union members.

Wingfield said he believed the city's newest hires are more examples of how out-of-touch the Hawkins administration is with "real people in Orange."

"The administration recently hired some guys for the Fire Department, but they were

all from South Jersey, not from Orange," Wingfield said. "Wasn't there anybody from this area who they could have hired? We have people here in Orange and other parts of Essex County who need work, too. Why do we have to go all the way down to South Jersey to find people to hire?"

Glassman and Hessler were laid off from their departments; Hessler from Upper Freehold Township in Monmouth County, Glassman from Gloucester City in Camden County.

Wingfield said since Hawkins became mayor he has consistently gone outside of Orange to fill positions while he believed there were qualified area residents available.

"The really disturbing thing is that not only has he hired people from outside the

city, he also paid them the highest salaries possible even though he was telling everybody that we don't have any money," Wingfield said. "If we don't have any money, how can he afford to hire new people and pay them the maximum amounts possible? Where did the money come from?"

Hawkins could not be reached for comment. In the past he has said the city would hire the best qualified people regardless of residence.

"I have tried to find the best people for those jobs who had the most to offer Orange, whether they were from the city or not," said Hawkins. "I will continue to do that, but that doesn't come cheap."

Managing Editor John Zucal contributed to this article.