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Supervisors Approve ConFire Labor Contract

By Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, acting as the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District board of directors, approved a new labor agreement between the district and Local 1230 of the firefighters' union at a special Dec. 19 meeting. The highlights of the new contract include a 7.5 percent pay increase, the gradual elimination of the 9 percent firefighters' subvention of the employer portion of retirement costs and beginning in 2016, an equal split between the district and the firefighters for any increase in their medical benefits premium. The contract term runs July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2017.

"The contract maintains a balance between how much we bring our firefighters up in wages and what we need to do for the organization after not allocating any infrastructure money over the last few years," said Fire Chief Jeff Carman. The board recently approved a \$10 million purchase of fire apparatus for this fiscal year, with a similar purchase expected next year. Carman stressed that his goal for 2015 is to be able to maintain the district's 24 companies and two squads as they are currently assigned.

"Based on the current circumstances - coming out of a recession and trying to rebuild our district - I think it's a fair contract," said Vince Wells, Local 1230 president. "Our firefighters have not had a pay increase since 2008. In fact, we lost 10 percent. We tried to get some of that money back and get it back in a timely fashion."

The contract is cleverly constructed to give the rank and file a bump of some sort every six months beginning Jan. 1. A 2.5 percent wage increase kicks in then, followed by another 2.5 percent July 1, with a final 2.5 percent raise July 1, 2016. Three percent of the subvention of the employer retirement contribution discontinues Jan. 1, with a further 3 percent reduction Jan. 1, 2016 and a final 3 percent decrease exactly one year later, at which point the entire 9 percent subvention disappears.

"In the long run, the 9 percent retirement contribution going away was the biggest thing for us in the contract," said Wells.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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