

12 more laid-off employees are rehired

Non-uniformed personnel return after being released earlier this year

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

As quiet as it has been kept relative to the big announcements and fanfare that accompanied his administration's rehiring of laid-off police officers and firefighters, city officials welcomed back several more previously released employees.

"We reached a deal back in July and we came back to work officially on July 11," said Raymond Wingfield, president of the union that represents city employees except for police and fire personnel. "We got all of the DPW workers back, everybody in the courts, but not all of the laid-off employees from the other departments were brought back. We wanted people to get hired back based on seniority, but the city wanted to do

Workers were called back after the city hired new officials and granted a salary increase to a promoted official.

it by need, so we got 12 people back. In the contract we stipulated that in the event that a need arises for the jobs in the city, then they must bring back the most senior person left on the layoff list."

Wingfield said he and his union members agreed to that concession. He said in any contract negotiation neither side is going to get everything they want.

Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. announced June 28 that former Department of Public Works Deputy Director Calvin Bell had been promoted to acting director while former Director Arlene Kemp was moved to serve as the city's municipal engineer. Bell received a \$19,000 salary increase in his new position.

At that time, city officials also hired a new chief financial officer, finance director and tax assessor. Hawkins said the staffing changes would result in a "total annual savings of \$130,000" compared to the previous total salaries and benefits.

Wingfield said those moves, in addition to others that have occurred since Hawkins took office in 2008, hurt laid-off city workers.

"That was unfair when you had people laid off, and I told the mayor and the heads of

the other unions that," Wingfield said. "It was also unfair to do promotions when people were still laid off. It just was not a good look for the city when he's bringing in outside people for some of these positions when there are actually qualified people from right here in the city and the rest of Essex County who could do the job."

Hawkins could not be reached for comment by press time. The city laid off 52 employees and demoted 24 more early this year in order to help close what was a \$6.4 million shortfall in the 2011 city budget.

Since then, most of the police personnel have been rehired; the Fire Department agreed to terms to rehire all of the laid-off firefighters; and city officials are hiring 12 more through a federal grant.