

# Officials defend hiring of 'outside' firefighters

*Non-uniformed union leader said department should have recruited local candidates first*

By John Zucal  
Managing Editor

City officials have taken issue with the comments of a municipal union official who objected to the hiring of two firefighters from outside Essex County.

The firefighters, who had been laid off from departments in Camden and Monmouth counties, were hired in July as the first of 12 new firefighters under a federal grant the city received earlier this year. After their hirings, Raymond Wingfield, who heads the Orange Municipal Employee Benevolent Association, questioned if city

officials should have first sought candidates from within the city or county.

City officials utilized a state law which allows municipalities to hire firefighters who were laid off on without requiring them to go to through the testing and academy process. The state Department of Labor maintains a list of eligible firefighters.

Attempts to reach Wingfield were not successful.

In a City Hall interview with several city officials, Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. said Wingfield's concerns were unfounded. He said all of Orange's firefighters who had

been laid off in January due to budget constraints were rehired or found employment in other municipalities.

"There are not 10 firefighters laid off from Orange elsewhere," said Hawkins, referring to the number of positions the city must fill under the three-year federal grant. He said the city is looking at hiring six firefighters shortly — two from the state list, four from the county Fire Academy.

Three of the four academy candidates are from Orange, said Fire Chief Robert Manganelli. He added the city trio came out of a group of 14 applicants.

Manganelli said a concern with the Fire Department is that many potential applicants do not advance past the screening process. It includes a background check.

"In our and police business, the process is different than for non-uniformed candidates; the screening process is different," said Manganelli. "We're in and out of people's homes. There has to be a level of trust."

City Attorney Marvin Braker said the legal term for fire and police personnel is "special public servants, for they require a higher level of integrity."