

South Lake Tahoe fire chief submits resignation

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Lorenzo Gigliotti tendered his resignation Thursday. His last day on the job will be Sept. 1.

In a sweeping interview in his office May 6, Gigliotti looked like a man ready to take on new challenges – possibly in the Lake Tahoe Basin – but also as one who is wistful about his six years at the helm of SLTFD and what the future might bring.

The 46-year-old said he likes to be an innovator. He calls himself an “architect of significant change.” With economic constraints placed on the city, the department has fiscal limitations that don’t lend themselves toward the changes he likes to make.



Lorenzo
Gigliotti

While he survived the round of layoffs and incentivized early retirements in the city’s reorganization plan earlier this year, Gigliotti knows his departure will be a financial savings to the city. He also survived a vote of no confidence from the firefighters union.

In his letter of resignation, Gigliotti wrote, “My hope is

that any realized savings or economies from my leaving can be used to preserve the integrity of the response system the community presently enjoys.”

To *Lake Tahoe News* he said his decision to leave had nothing to do with all the changes City Manager Tony O’Rourke has made since coming on board in August.

“We have a real strategic plan after all these years. It’s all good stuff,” Gigliotti said. “But they need a fresh set of eyes.”

O’Rourke does not know how the hierarchy in the department will shake out.

“The good news is we have sufficient time to proceed in an orderly fashion to arrange for an effective transition,” O’Rourke said.

Besides the traditional routes of considering internal or external fire chief candidates, O’Rourke said he would look at the entire public safety structure to see if one person in charge of police and fire would be viable. The city has done this before.

“We also need to know how it’s going to go with collective bargaining because if we don’t get some of the concessions that are built into the five-year plan, that will have some weight on what direction we go,” O’Rourke said.

Time in Tahoe

Since his arrival in January 2005, Gigliotti has been part of the 2007 Angora Fire, the recent signing of another five-year ambulance agreement with Lake Valley Fire and El Dorado County, managing 43 employees two years ago to 39 today, changes in council members, and a change in who his boss is.

The dated alder wood and green paint that were in his office when he arrived are still there. Same with the well worn brown

chairs.

The 2,000-magazines and other debris were hauled out. Now manuals and binders fill the space in his office on the second floor of the station near the Y.

After the 2005-06 flooding on the South Shore that required about \$1.5 million in cleanup costs, Gigliotti's responsibilities increased to be the city's emergency response manager.

This is his third year he will manage the mutual aid between the nine California and nine Nevada fire agencies that include the basin and reach up to Reno.

It's those interagency agreements that account for mutual aid support on a routine basis as well as during catastrophes like the 2007 Angora Fire.

In the last four years the city has bought three wildland firefighting engines. Pre-Angora it had a couple pickups that could go off-pavement.

When he talks about how the assault on the fire was executed it is with a certain calm, but also with a bit of authority.

All that Gigliotti would have changed is the weather. That Sunday nearly four years ago was so incredibly windy. When the winds shifted, it sent flames racing toward the 254 houses that were eventually reduced to ash.

When it comes to medical care, South Lake Tahoe and Lake Valley fire departments were awarded the ambulance contract by El Dorado County earlier this year after having first secured the contract 10 years ago.

One thing Gigliotti will be working on before he leaves is what to do with station No. 2. He said an internal study shows the station on Highway 50 across from South Tahoe Middle School is functioning fine.

O'Rourke wants an independent evaluation, which will be done May 18-20 when a consultant from Texas comes to town to assess the level of service and response from that station and at the two other main ones in town. A fourth station is unmanned at the airport.

In the last 10 years, the department has averaged about 2,900 calls a year.

What's next?

Gigliotti, who with his wife has six children ranging in age from twin 9-year-olds to a 29-year-old, wants to stay in the basin. As he wraps up things in the department, he will contemplate where he goes next.

He's been in the fire service business for 29 years, having started as a paramedic in San Diego.

Gigliotti is entrenched in Rotary and has been instrumental in getting the Cub Scouts being viable at Bijou.

When he's not in uniform, Gigliotti can be found touring on his motorcycle.