

When city retirement pays better than the job

By Jack Dolan, Los Angeles Times

James Mussenden doesn't bring up his pension in casual conversation. No point getting his golf partners' blood boiling.

The retired city manager of El Monte collects more than \$216,000 a year, plus cost-of-living increases and fully paid health insurance.

"It's giving me an opportunity to do a number of things I didn't get to do when I was younger, like travel to Europe, take some things off my bucket list," Mussenden, 66, said recently. He even flew to Scotland to play the famed Old Course at St. Andrews, a mecca for golf enthusiasts.

Mussenden recognizes that few Americans have pensions anymore – least of all the El Monte taxpayers who are funding his retirement. So while he enjoys his monthly retirement check, he's discreet about it.

"The guys I play golf with, they get very angry about my pension because they don't have anything like it," he said.

Actually, Mussenden has two pensions. He's part of a coterie of former El Monte civil servants who receive one taxpayer-funded pension through the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) – and a second through a "supplemental" plan approved by the city council in 2000.

The extra pensions, along with other sweeteners granted to El Monte employees over the years, have created one of the heaviest public pension burdens of any city in California, a *Los Angeles Times* investigation found.

Read the whole story