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## Fire investigator appeals March demotion

Forsyth County's civil service board heard testimony last week that a former fire marshal spent hours a day at a subordinate's desk, disrupting her work and preventing him from getting his own done.

In the hearing, which began Thursday and will continue Monday, Steve Anderson is appealing his demotion in March to firefighter II.

Anderson, who had served as the county's chief fire investigator for 15 years, was demoted following a county investigation into his conduct.

He had been suspended with pay for nearly a month while the investigation was conducted.

The probe centered on allegations Anderson had behaved inappropriately toward Robin Brackett, an administrative specialist under his direct supervision, between November and February.

Anderson was disciplined for five violations of two county policies, which included workplace harassment of a sexual and discriminatory nature. He was also accused of falsifying documents and wasting time.

In addition, he was placed on probation for one year and stripped of his supervisory duties.

The hearing on his appeal to the civil service board began Thursday.

Greg Fidlon, Anderson's attorney, noted in his opening statements that his client had had an unblemished work history and that Anderson and Brackett never had a sexual relationship.

He said evidence would show that Anderson's conduct toward her "was far from unwelcome."

"To the contrary, Ms. Brackett accepted an invitation to attend a concert with Mr. Anderson outside of work, went to dinner with Mr. Anderson, admitted to the human resources investigator that she engaged in very sexually explicit conversations with Mr. Anderson on her personal cell phone, initiated calls to Mr. Anderson after hours on her personal cell phone and sent him dozens of text messages," he said.

Fidlon said Brackett also brought her personal laptop computer to the office for Anderson to fix and "enjoyed a flirtatious relationship with Mr. Anderson at work and used the situation to her advantage."

Fidlon said Anderson limited his interactions with Brackett in February after she told him she was dating someone and wanted to return to having a strictly work relationship with him.

Brackett, along with other witnesses, testified that in November she attended a gospel concert with Anderson, but only after telling him they would go as friends and not as a date.

She said they held a meeting with their co-workers to stop rumors they were in a romantic relationship and to explain the circumstances under which they were attending the concert.

She said Anderson began spending more and more time at her desk after the concert and distracted her from work.

"I would say he came around behind my desk almost daily," she said. "I would say, 'You're in my space, you need to get out of my space.' And at one point I even got some (crime scene) caution tape and put it between my desk and the wall so nobody could come behind my desk."

She said their conversations gradually progressed from being about lighter topics such as music and work to a more sexual nature.

She confirmed that Anderson worked on her personal laptop computer while on the clock and they had begun talking on the phone after hours. Those conversations became sexual as well.

She said Anderson asked her personal questions, which made her uncomfortable because he was her superior.

Brackett said although she felt uncomfortable, she didn't want to report his behavior because she didn't want to jeopardize her job and thought eventually it would stop.

She said she finally spoke to Fire Chief Danny Bowman in late February, after another employee said what had been happening would likely come out in an upcoming civil service hearing on another matter.

Brenda Green, the department timekeeper, testified that Anderson told her on Jan. 8 to clock Brackett in at 7:30 a.m., although they did not arrive at the office that day until about 10 a.m.

Witnesses testified that Anderson had gone to pick up Brackett about 8 a.m. at her home because she was snowed in. The two arrived hours later after having stopped at several places to pick up breakfast.

Anderson began working for the fire department on Jan. 3, 1995. His base salary has been reduced from about \$71,434 to \$53,841.

Capt. Kevin Wallace is serving as interim fire marshal.

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