

Residency requirements popular in south suburbs

Officials say living in village shows commitment to community

NWI Times ILLINOIS EDITION May 07, 2006 TERRIE HENDERSON thenderson@nwitimes.com

Calumet City Mayor Michelle Markiewicz Qualkinbush said she heard rumors that she owned property in Indiana. She knew those rumors had become widespread when a gas station employee asked her if they were true. Qualkinbush said she does not own a house in Crown Point or Cedar Lake, as rumors suggest. She does own a small trailer near Indiana's Lake Shafer, but her home and main residence is in Calumet City.

She said residency requirements have become an emotional issue in the city. Some people have tried to identify workers who do not comply with the residency requirement. And the city investigates every time a worker is suspected of living outside of the city.

Many places like Calumet City have residency requirements for city, town or village employees that are intended to strengthen the community.

Calumet City has a residency requirement for all municipal workers. Fire, police and dispatch personnel must live within a 20-mile radius of the city and all other employees must live in the city.

Ed Paesel, executive director of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, said cities decide independently if they want to implement residency requirements.

"From our point of view, residency requirements are strictly a local decision," Paesel said. "What's good in one community might not be in another." Paesel said he understands why a city would implement a residency requirement. "In a lot of cases, it's good to have employees live in the community that they work in," Paesel said. "Some communities view it as the employee having a stake in the future."



Ed Paesel
Executive Director
South Suburban
Mayors and Managers
Association

Denise Wheaton, Calumet City payroll expeditor, said city workers voted in November 2004 to implement a residency requirement as part of their union contract. By agreeing to the residency requirement, employees received a higher pay increase, she said.

"At least we left it up to the employees," Wheaton said. "It was a very close vote. You could probably take the vote today and it would be different than two years ago." Wheaton said employees should continue to have the deciding vote on residency requirements because it affects them directly. "You have to follow the contract," Wheaton said. She said the contract ends in April 2008 and she expects that residency will again be a highly debated issue.

Harvey spokeswoman Sandra Alvarado said Harvey does not have a residency requirement but that police officers must live within a 22-mile radius of the city.

Lansing Village President Dan Podgorski said Lansing does have a residency requirement for all municipal workers.

Matthew Fares, chief of staff for Chicago Heights, said all municipal employees must live in the city and that residency is verified annually.

"Obviously, it shows a community effort to turn the city around and move the city in a positive direction," Fares said.

South Holland Mayor Don De Graff said he strongly believes that a residency requirement is good for the community. "There is benefit for those who live in the town, to be in the community in which they work," De Graff said.