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**'I deserve every penny of it' Oak Brook's clout-heavy former police chief unapologetic about benefitting from taxpayer-funded pension sweetener Oak Brook's clout-heavy former police chief is unapologeticabout benefitting from a taxpayer-funded pension sweetener**

By Robert Herguth and Dave McKinney

Staff reporters

At first blush, a pension bill adopted by the General Assembly in 2007 seemed to have a laudable goal: extending retirement benefits to local police force employees' widows after they remarried.

But buried within the legislation was something considerably less altruistic: a provision that enabled a member of one of Chicago's better-known political families to boost his pension by more than $30,000 a year - while saddling unsuspecting taxpayers in Oak Brook with nearly $750,000 in funding liabilities, the Chicago Sun-Times and Better Government Association have learned.

The recipient of that larger pension, Thomas Sheahan, is a former police chief in Oak Brook, the current village manager in Lyons and a member of a Democratic clan that has helped rule Chicago's Southwest Side for decades.

Sharp-tongued and unapologetic about benefitting from the provision that no one else has used, the 59-year-old Sheahan said of his pension: "I worked for 24 f------ years [in the public sector], I deserve every penny of it and I deserve a lot f------ more."

Retiring from Oak Brook last spring, Sheahan now is drawing an annual payout of nearly $77,000. Although pension records show that's about $32,000 more than he would have received had he retired at the same point without the legislation, Sheahan said it's still a relatively modest sum. "I get about what a sergeant gets," he said.

Sheahan - brother of former Cook County Sheriff Michael Sheahan and James "Skinny" Sheahan, a long-time aide to ex-Mayor Richard M. Daley - wouldn't say if or how he was involved in the origin of the pension sweetener.

Either way, Oak Brook leaders are hopeful they can blunt the financial implications of the legislation. To that end, the village has filed an appeal with the taxpayer-subsidized pension plan now paying Sheahan, the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund, or IMRF.

"Oak Brook got shafted," Oak Brook Village Manager Dave Niemeyer said.

In short, the 2007 provision created a now-expired six-month window for members of one public-sector pension fund (the Municipal Employees' Annuity and Benefit Fund, or MEABF) to transfer credit into another (the "Sheriff's Law Enforcement Personnel" program of IMRF) if they participated in both.

The main sponsor of the bill, then-state Rep. Bob Molaro (D-Chicago), told members of the Illinois House that the tweak to the state's pension code was intended to help one person, according to a transcript that didn't identify the person.

But according to pension officials, the sole beneficiary ended up being Sheahan, who shifted five years of credit from MBEAF into IMRF so he could retire in 2011 with roughly 24 years of combined service. Without the legislation, he would have had fewer than 19 years of service and retired with two pensions worth a collective $45,000 rather than one worth $77,000, according to Oak Brook records obtained under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.

By cobbling together service from past employers - prior to working for Oak Brook for six years, Sheahan worked for Chicago's municipal government for six and a half years and the Deerfield Police Department for nearly 13 - he "had enough service to retire under [the IMRF program] and get the higher formula; without [the legislation] he would have either retired with a lower benefit, or worked more years to get 20 years," a benchmark crucial in securing a premium pension, said IMRF Executive Director Louis Kosiba.

Sheahan, MBEAF and Deerfield all contributed to Sheahan's pension, but Oak Brook was hit with the biggest liability by far - almost $750,000 - because that's where he last worked, drew the highest salary (about $130,000) and enrolled in the IMRF special program.

Village officials said they only learned in recent months, by accident, that there was such a big tab owed to the IMRF. Neither Sheahan, Molaro nor the IMRF ever notified them, village officials said.

Molaro declined to be interviewed, but released a statement to the Sun-Times indicating he did not know Thomas Sheahan at the time the legislation was crafted, something Sheahan echoes. They came to know each other, however, after Molaro left the Legislature in late 2008 and, with a partner, became a $5,000-a-month lobbyist for Oak Brook.

Molaro said in the statement: "Any attempt to connect the sponsorship of this bill and my being part of the lobbying team for the village of Oak Brook is completely unfounded and absurd."

Molaro did not identify who approached him about including the pension-sweetener in his legislation but insisted that it was not the former Oak Brook police chief.

"Neither Tom Sheahan nor anyone else on his behalf ever contacted me about this matter," Molaro said.

A lawyer representing Sheahan, James Sheahan and Michael Sheahan also made that contention.

"None of the Sheahans ever had any contact with Rep. Molaro or any other member of the General Assembly requesting support for the bill," said Terrence Sheahan, who is Michael Sheahan's son.

Thomas Sheahan said village officials are only speaking out about his pension because they want to punish him for suing after his departure from Oak Brook. The suit, in which Sheahan and others alleged corruption and cover-ups in the local government, recently was dismissed by the judge.

Sheahan now is village manager in Lyons, where he said he's paid roughly $65,000 a year for fewer than 20 hours a week. The job will not qualify him for a new pension, nor will it increase his current pension payouts, he said.

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