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Former fire commissioner Hoff retires to job in suburbs

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Two weeks after retiring from the \$202,728-a-year pressure cooker job as Chicago fire commissioner, Robert Hoff has accepted a \$115,000-a-year job as deputy fire chief of Carol Stream.

Hoff was one of the most decorated firefighters in the history of the Chicago Fire Department.

His decision to turn right around and accept a new, six-figure job allows him to start collecting a city pension that amounts to 80 percent of an average of the highest four of his last ten years of city salary.

It also calls into question Hoff's claim that he was hanging it up at 56 to spend more time with his family — and adds fuel to the claim that he quit, in part, to avoid making the staffing and firehouse cuts that Mayor Rahm Emanuel is almost certain to demand.

On Tuesday, Emanuel wished Hoff well and insisted that the Carol Stream job was far less stressful than the hot seat he occupied in Chicago.

"We can all agree that doing the operations in Carol Stream is not running the Chicago Fire Department. It's a down-shift. Bob will be the [first] one to tell you that," the mayor said.

"He had been on the job for over three decades. The announcement came two days after the 50th anniversary of his father dying on the job. He himself came to the point [where he said], 'I just don't have it after three decades.' I want somebody — which is what we have with Jose Santiago — who's ready to go 24/7, seven days-a-week, 365 days-a-year running the Chicago Fire Department. I compliment Bob on coming to that recognition. I wish him well on his new endeavor. And I'm excited about the fact that Jose Santiago is ready to take control."

Hoff is a third-generation Chicago firefighter whose father was killed in a building collapse while fighting a South Side fire when the younger Hoff was just five years old. Thomas Hoff was 44.

Robert Hoff was twice awarded the Carter Harrison Award, the Chicago Fire Department's highest honor for bravery. In 1984, he suffered severe burns in an attic fire and spent 21 days in the burn unit.

"It was a flashback. The day I got burned, my son was five years old," Hoff once said.

His appointment was hailed by Chicago aldermen as one of former Mayor Richard M. Daley's "finest." It was a surprise to no one that he was one of only a handful of department heads to be retained by Emanuel.
