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TEAM Santa Rosa rehires military advocate Gandy

Air Force colonel's first appointment sparked controversy

Louis Cooper
lcooper@pnj.com

The man who drew criticism about how he originally got the contract to be the military advocate for TEAM Santa Rosa Economic Development Council has been awarded the \$40,000 annual contract for another year.

Pace resident Pete Gandy, a retired Air Force colonel and former chief executive officer at Santa Rosa Medical Center in Milton, was chosen over 12 other applicants. The field was narrowed to three who were interviewed by a selection committee on Nov. 9.

TEAM Santa Rosa is the economic development arm for the county. The military advocate serves as the liaison to the military bases in the county.

The committee recommended that to the TEAM board of directors that Gandy be rehired. The board unanimously agreed on Monday.

Some Santa Rosa County residents have charged that Gandy's original appointment was improper because Gandy, a former TEAM board member, was involved in the selection process. Also, they complained that the position was not adequately advertised.

This time, the position was advertised online, in several newspapers and at local military installations.

The other finalists were John Grove of Milton and Bruce Watson of Pensacola, both retired Navy officers.

Gandy's contract is good for one year, with a two-year option.

The TEAM Santa Rosa board also changed its bylaws Monday so that the Santa Rosa County Commission has five appointments to the 20-member board. The commission requested that action last summer.

So far, there have been three commission appointees: Pace businessman and former state legislator Ed Fortune, Gulf Breeze Mayor Beverly Zimmern and NAI Halford broker Gerry Goldstein.

Attorney Bruce Partington told the board that it clearly falls under the state Sunshine Law because the commission is making appointments and most of the board's money comes from the county.

The Sunshine Law requires the board members to advertise all meetings, to make decisions in public meetings and to refrain from discussing matters that may come before them for a vote outside of public meetings.

In the past, TEAM Santa Rosa has been resistant to considering itself a public agency. However, the

Governor's Office and State Attorney's Office also previously concluded that TEAM falls under the Sunshine Law.

Mike Diehl, a board member from SunTrust Bank, said he is convinced TEAM is subject to the Sunshine Law.

"To me, it's fruitless to keep arguing the point," Diehl said

Only board member Dave Hoxeng, owner of Cat Country 98.7/NewsRadio 1620, voted against the bylaws change.

"I'm good with the open meetings and open records," Hoxeng said. "However, I have great concerns about me being unable to go with another board member to Atlanta to lure a business to come back to Santa Rosa County. Before this year, we were able to do that."
