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## Commissioners ratify contract with firefighters

Sarasota County commissioners today unanimously ratified a contract with the International Association of Firefighters, AFL-CIO Local 2546. Retroactive to Oct. 1, 2008, the contract is effective until Sept. 30, 2011.

“In these challenging economic circumstances when Sarasota County anticipates continued declining revenues and further pressure on the budget, I want to salute our firefighters who worked with us to achieve an agreement beneficial to both sides,” said Emergency Services Executive Director Michael Suarez. “These brave men and women go out of their way every day to provide an exemplary service to the people of Sarasota County.”

Key components of the new agreement include:

- **Pay plan** – The agreement provides the following compensation:
  - Year one - Maintains current base pay and specialties for all classifications.
  - Year two – A 3 percent increase in base wages and paramedic specialty pay.
  - Year three – A 3 percent increase in base wages.
  - Maintains current longevity pay for the term of the contract.
  
- **Sick leave** – Employees hired before Jan. 1, 1999, will be eligible for a leave payout of 50 percent of their accrued sick leave. The remaining 50 percent of the sick leave balance will remain in the employee’s sick leave bank with no eligibility for payout upon separation.

Depending on the payout amount, employees may elect to be paid in two installments over a two-year period, frozen at the hourly rate in effect upon the expiration date of the employee’s election period.

- **Health insurance** – The HMO only will be available to employees through Dec. 31, 2009. Employees may elect to participate in the county’s 2009 health care options (POSII and AHF). No later than July 1 of a given year, the IAFF may notify the county of its election to opt out of the health care plan.

The county will establish a committee by Sept. 1, to review health insurance issues.

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