

Top cop to step down

▷ Continued from Page 1A

ty Building second-floor conference room.

Afterward, support for Fitzpatrick was strong.

Police union President Ron Carey said the chief would not lose any credibility in coming months. Carey also said the commission's investigation would not cause instability on the police force.

"We've got professional officers," he said. "The job will get done."

The investigation will focus on whether Fitzpatrick had improper private conversations with a police commissioner about the department's efforts to discipline Rinaldo. Rinaldo is accused of lying and using his position to influence a state investigation of criminal

deer-poaching charges against him.

After an internal department probe, Fitzpatrick filed misconduct charges against Rinaldo in April.

Rinaldo's

lawyers turned the tables on the chief three weeks ago. After the chief denied discussing the case with a police commissioner, the lawyers produced what they described as a tape-recording of such a conversation by cellular telephone — raising the possibility that Fitzpatrick had lied under oath.

Asked about the accusations Thursday, Fitzpatrick said: "My opinion and my position is that I've done nothing wrong."

Community's loss

A member of the police force for 25 years, he listed among his accomplishments diversifying the force to include women and minorities, improving officer training and forming special units such as a bomb squad and drug team.

Having qualified for a full pension five years ago, he said he already was thinking about retirement when the Rinaldo episode occurred.

"Although recent events played a part in my decision," Fitzpatrick said, "they are certainly not the exclusive reason."

His retirement will take effect



William
Fitzpatrick

'An outstanding young man'

A look back at William Fitzpatrick's career with the Rockford Police Department:

■ **April 1971:** A native of north suburban Chicago, he joins the police force after graduating from Northern Illinois University.

■ **September 1975:** At age 28, he takes a leave of absence to get a master's degree in criminology in England.

■ **September 1977:** Upon his return, he briefs City Council members on his overseas experience and is hailed as a new generation of Rockford cops.

■ **October 1985:** Now a lieutenant, he succeeds Chief Delbert Peterson, who calls his 38-year-old successor "an outstanding young man who will do Rockford proud."

■ **September 1988:** He is named in a \$15 million lawsuit — later thrown out — filed by the family of a prisoner who died in police custody a year earlier.

■ **February 1990:** A Register

Star report credits Fitzpatrick with computerizing the police department and making other improvements, but finds the department solves only 31 percent of robberies and 19 percent of burglaries.

■ **March 1992:** He resists using city funds but supports a gun buy-back program, which gets 370 weapons off the streets.

■ **January 1995:** Rockford records a record-high 30 homicides in 1994. Fitzpatrick points out robberies and other crimes are down.

■ **April 1996:** Saying "nobody is above the rules," he files misconduct charges against Lt. Joseph Rinaldo stemming from a deer-poaching case involving Rinaldo.

■ **June 1996:** Rinaldo's lawyers accuse Fitzpatrick of improperly discussing the case with a police commissioner, prompting Mayor Charles Box to call for an investigation.

next July 10 — his 50th birthday.

Jackie Confer of the Coalition for a Safer Community said she'll be sad to see Fitzpatrick go. She credits him with helping the citizens group organize a 1992 gun buyback program that took 370 weapons off the streets.

"It's a real loss for the community," Confer said of his retirement.

Box asked the three previous fire and police commission members to resign June 7 after questions of conflict arose in the Rinaldo case, including one commissioner's employment in the Public Safety Building and another's private discussions with Fitzpatrick.

The mayor said Thursday he reviewed more than 20 candidates and would name his three choices today.

Box said the commission would have no trouble investigating Fitzpatrick while also searching for his replacement.

"I don't think it muddies the waters," he said. "I think they both can go on simultaneously."

Chronology

Dec. 11: Lt. Joseph Rinaldo and his hunting partner, Winnebago County Sheriff Don Gasparini, are charged in Ogle County with hunting on private property and failure to tag deer.

Dec. 20: Gasparini pleads guilty to the misdemeanor charges and pays \$1,000 in fines.

Dec. 22: Rinaldo pleads not guilty and remains on suspension with pay from the police department.

April 15: Police Chief William Fitzpatrick accuses Rinaldo of lying and trying to use his position to influence the deer-hunting investigation.

June 2: At a police commission hearing, Rinaldo lawyers accuse Fitzpatrick of improperly discussing the case with a commissioner.

June 7: Mayor Charles Box asks all three commissioners to resign for the sake of impartiality in the Rinaldo case.

June 14: Box says he will ask the new commission to investigate Fitzpatrick's conduct in the Rinaldo case.