

The Maui News

Last call for Silva as liquor control director

WAILUKU – Dana Souza was selected as the next director of the Maui County Department of Liquor Control on Wednesday, following the announced retirement of longtime head Franklyn Silva.

The county Liquor Control Commission voted unanimously to select Souza as the department's new leader after the commission voted to waive the selection process. Souza currently serves as the Makawao commissioner and will replace Silva when he retires Nov. 1.

“Everybody felt he was the right person,” said Robert Tanaka, chairman of the commission.

Tanaka said Silva let the commission know “a while ago” about his interest in retiring, but officially announced his retirement last month. Silva has spent 33 years working in the department, including more than two decades as director.

“He was a fantastic director as far as I know him,” Tanaka said. “He was an officer in the military, so there was no nonsense to him. He kind continued that on so I had no problem with him.”

Silva, who retired from the United States Army Aviation at 37 years old, said he was “too young to kick back,” so he sought a job in law enforcement. After spending two years as the manager of Kaanapali Airport, he became a liquor investigator. Three years later, he was promoted to senior licensing investigator, where he served until he was selected as director.

“My main focus was on minors and over-service,” he said in his office. “I could forgive about everything else, but those. We have one of the best minor sting programs in the state. Summertime, prom time – whenever the kids are out, we’re out. We’re in the bars every night looking at the young faces or those that got their heads on the table.”

While much of the department’s work is focused on underage drinking and public intoxication, allegations of bribes and corruption have shrouded the department for more than two decades.

Silva has come under fire recently for a 2012 lawsuit filed by a fired liquor control officer who claims field supervisors overlooked violations and received free food, drinks and gifts from some liquor establishments they were charged with inspecting. According to published reports, settlement talks between whistleblower Justin Dobbs and the county have broken down and the case may move to a jury trial.

In 1994, two former liquor control investigators sued the county for retaliating against them for blowing the whistle on alleged corrupt activities by their supervisors. The former investigators were later joined by two others and a jury awarded a total of \$225,652 in back pay and benefits for the plaintiffs, except one of the investigators, according to published reports.

The former investigators alleged that then-department director Joseph Souza, Dana Souza’s father, was accused of receiving payments by a convicted felon, who had been granted a liquor license – a violation of state and county liquor laws, according to published reports. The former employees also alleged that liquor laws were being selectively enforced, and some licensees were receiving preferential treatment.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation was notified of the allegations, but no charges were ever brought against Joseph Souza, who retired in 1993.

Tanaka said Joseph Souza’s history and relation “had nothing to do with Dana’s selection.” Tanaka added that “nothing came up” with the FBI investigation, and Joseph Souza was never charged.

“It was just innuendoes,” Tanaka said. “As far as I know and recall, there were people who had some grudge against him and made false accusations. The FBI went through everything, and they found nothing and that’s why they dismissed it.

“A lot of people believe what they read, so I guess they got to get the facts.”

Dana Souza could not be reached for comment.

Looking toward the future, Silva said the department that has eight enforcement officers and two vacancies will need to grow with Maui’s increasing population. Enforcement officers said they will need more manpower in the years to come to keep up with the greater workload and ongoing investigations.

“You look at the gross sales. It keeps going up every year by several millions of dollars,” Silva said. “It’s like about \$269 million worth of liquor sold in Maui County in the past year – that’s a lot.”

Despite the current lawsuit hanging over the department, Silva said he was content with his time as director. He said he has “the best staff anywhere” and that the next director needs to “have their trust and loyalty because they’re the ones that do all the work.”

“It went by so fast,” he said. “You’re out there. You’re up front, and you take the hits, but it’s been mostly good. You expect to take some heat every now and then, but the 22 years as the director was not that bad. It was pretty good.”

* Chris Sugidono can be reached at csugidono@mauinews.com.